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Sept-Oct 2018 | sojo.net

Faith in Action for Social Justice

Dangerous GAMES

A conversation with
Dr. Bennet Omalu on
why your children
should never play
football again.

PLUS:

Unrequired reading

#InternsToo

Making unions
great again



How Christianity was corrupted by past religious leaders.

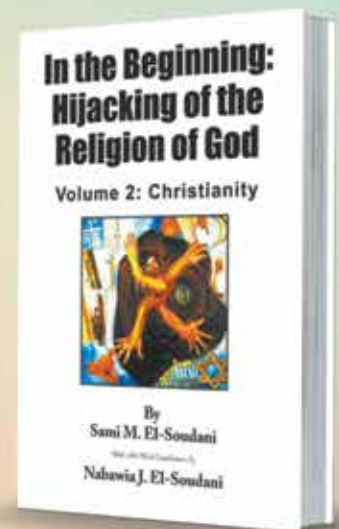
In the Beginning: Hijacking of the Religion of God

Volume 2: Christianity

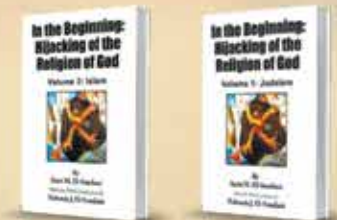
By Sami M. El-Soudani

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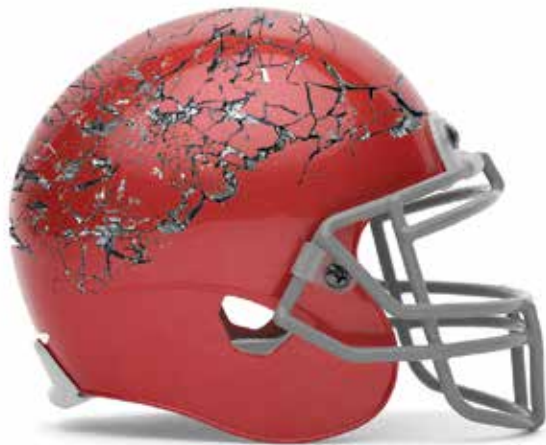


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18

contents

SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2018 Vol. 47 | No. 9

COVER

18 A Deal with the Devil

Dr. Bennet Omalu's discoveries about brain injuries from football are causing many parents to rethink America's most violent sport.

by **Bradford William Davis**

Plus: Sports and justice, by Helena M. Hansson and David Keck/21

FEATURES

24 What You Have Done in the Dark...

A truth commission in North Carolina shines light on CIA torture.

by **Joya Wesley**

30 The War That Never Ended

We cannot solve the North Korean nuclear crisis without knowing history.

by **Inyeop Lee**

Plus: Christians in North Korea, by Joy Yoon/33

36 Make Unions Great Again

Why Christians should double down in support of organized labor.

by **Tony Campolo**

CULTURE WATCH

40 Books for your unrequired reading

Reviews: *Reconstructing the Gospel*; *Murder on Shades Mountain*; *Birthing Hope*

42 Eyes & Ears, by Danny Duncan Collum

43 On Film, by Gareth Higgins

COMMENTARY

8 Homeschool texts

9 Worker solidarity

10 #InternsToo

DEPARTMENTS

5 Letters

12 Homepage

35 Poetry

48 Living the Word

by **Pearl Maria Barros**

COLUMNS

7 Hearts & Minds

by **Jim Wallis**

14 Bridges

by **Eboo Patel**

16 Unfiltered

by **Kathy Khang**

47 The Hungry Spirit

by **Rose Marie Berger**

50 H'rumphs

by **Ed Sivey Jr.**

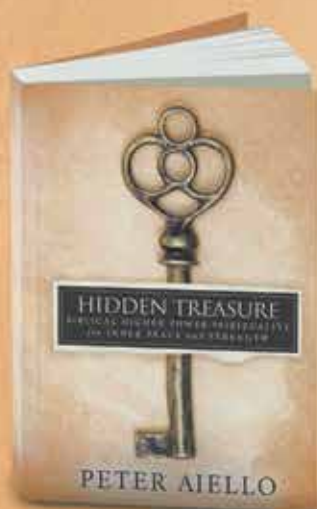


24



30

Overcome human weakness through the Bible to gain inner peace.



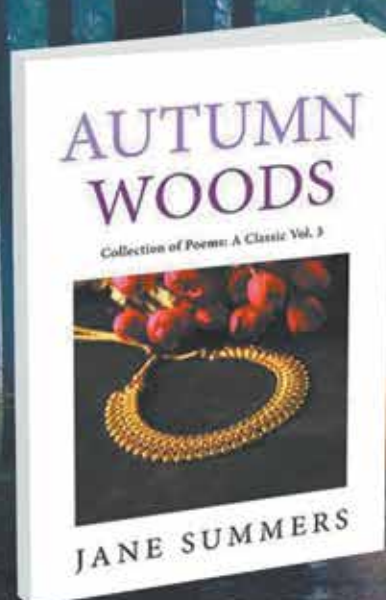
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By Peter Aiello

Many Christians are exploring other philosophies in search of inner peace and salvation. However, the framework for salvation is simply stated in the Bible. *Hidden Treasure* points the way to connect with the Biblical God which produces peace and strength.

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When the autumn leaves, starry, start to drizzle on the ground,
new promises are made, significant, of a grace of autumn!

AUTUMN WOODS

Collection of Poems: A Classic Vol. 3

By Jane Summers

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Purple, orange, and yellow—let these autumn colors renew your mind with originations of something new, touch your heart with untold stories, and strengthen your efforts in finding significance in the falling leaves with this collection of poems.

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FORMER SAN FRANCISCO 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick was presented Amnesty International's Ambassador of Conscience award this spring—previous winners have included Nobel Prize winners such as Nelson Mandela and Malala Yousafzai—for “his refusal to ignore or accept racial discrimination.” Kaepernick's “take a knee” protests against police violence sparked a movement, across football and other sports, and they rest upon a rich tradition of athletes who have stood up for justice in the broader society.

Our cover feature this month looks at one of the pre-eminent justice issues for the players themselves, particularly in football: brain

injuries. We talked with Dr. Bennet Omalu, the forensic pathologist who discovered pervasive brain trauma in NFL players. Omalu, whose research on chronic traumatic encephalopathy, or CTE, was chronicled in the 2015 Will Smith movie *Concussion*, argues in his latest book, *Brain Damage in Contact Sports*, that no child under 18 should play football. The increasing body of evidence, Omalu says, shows that 100 percent of people who play the sport are at risk of head trauma. For Omalu, a committed Catholic, there are clear moral issues at stake, especially concerning youth football. “We



shouldn't let children play, because we are damaging their brains and robbing them of their humanity. That is a fact.”

While Omalu's groundbreaking work obviously has the potential to revolutionize how parents—and therefore how the country—approach athletics, his story is not one to be relegated to the sports pages. With stakes this high, such injustice anywhere, including on the fields of competition, cries out for response even from those with otherwise little interest in what goes on under the Friday night lights. ■

Letters

What Jesus Really Said

In response to “Is Nonviolence Naive?” (by Andrew Klager, July 2018), remember this: Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers.” Not “Blessed are the peacekeepers.” We often confuse the two. Making peace is proactive!

Rick Williams
From Facebook

Violence Escalates

I enjoyed “Is Nonviolence Naive?” However, I think there was not enough of a distinction made between pacifism, absorbing the violence without reaction, and nonviolent resistance—which either throws a bar into the spokes of violence to stop it or puts it on public display to arouse outrage. Both tactics are intended for the ultimate redemption of the perpetrators of the violence. I found the discussion question on whether it was correct to punch a neo-Nazi poorly thought out. Violence always escalates (what Walter Wink calls “mimesis”), as can be observed in everything from a common street fight to a war. Mimesis states that, in any violent conflict, the methods of the “attacker”—if he or she resists—will rise to the level of the attacker plus one level. Eventually the “attacker” returns the favor and raises the ante on the level of violence. The question would soon

be, “Is it right to kill a neo-Nazi after you have punched him in the face, and the fight escalates?”

Daniel Lehman
New Bern, North Carolina

Committed to Peace

Regarding “Is Nonviolence Naive?”: Some would call themselves a “conscience objector,” others “nonviolent.” I happen to prefer the term “peacemaker.” It conveys actively pursuing a path that honors and values all persons toward peaceful resolution of conflict.

I am Anabaptist, committed to peace, not running

away from conflict, but embracing a greater hope even in the midst of conflict. I am glad to hear that the peace movement is growing among Catholic and Protestant groups.

Joseph Fox
From Facebook

Being Patient with Beavers

Let's hear it for beavers! Thanks, Bill McKibben (“Leave it to Beavers,” June 2018), for your enthusiasm. McKibben mentions occasionally flooded basements without saying how he convinced the beavers to relent. However, it seems that thousands of other Americans are not so

patient. As a result, Wildlife Services, a branch of the Department of Agriculture which, on request, also kills coyotes and cougars and such, is said to kill more than 20,000 beavers each year. It seems that many Americans do not want their property turned into environmentally friendly wetlands! Why the usual procedure is to kill rather than relocate beavers and other creatures, I do not know. But the Center for Biological Diversity has sued Wildlife Services over this issue, arguing that beavers are a keystone species and that we need to find more peaceful ways to live with them.

Norm Mundhenk
Silverdale, Washington

A Valuable Perspective

I enjoyed reading Wil Gafney's reflections in the Living the Word section (July 2017 to June 2018). What she shared encouraged and inspired me, and I appreciated that *Sojourners* gave me the opportunity to be taught regularly from the perspective of a woman of color.

Shevawn Ramsey
Huntington Beach, California

Your name here! Write to letters@sojo.net or Letters, *Sojourners*, 408 C Street NE, Washington, DC 20002. Include your name, city, and state. Letters may be edited.

Making peace is proactive.

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**The next application
deadline is Feb. 15, 2019.**

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BY JIM WALLIS

A Combination of Cruelty and Ineptitude



THIS SUMMER, people were filled with righteous anger about the separation of children from their families at the southern U.S. border. The crisis sparked a critical mass of outrage about the Trump administration's inhumane policy, especially when audio surfaced of separated children crying desperately for their parents. The press, a few members of Congress, and other elected leaders did heroic work in exposing the horrific human toll of these policies.

In the weeks the family separation policy was in place, more than 2,300 children were separated from their parents. Reuniting these children with their families will take months. Some of these children may never be reunited with parents—meaning they effectively have been made orphans by this administration's combination of cruelty and ineptitude.

Make no mistake: This was not merely an accidental byproduct of a convoluted and broken immigration

the abuse of immigrant children by claiming that zero tolerance, and by extension family separation, was “biblical,” offering a massive misinterpretation of Romans 13. Faith leaders from a wide variety of denominations—from the U.S. Catholic bishops and Sessions’ own United Methodist Church to the Southern Baptists and the National Association of Evangelicals—said no.

The broad group of Christian elders who initiated the Reclaiming Jesus movement, which Sojourners helped convene, issued a call to action titled “‘Suffer the Little Children’: The separation of immigrant children from their parents is not biblical.” The call offered a theological and scriptural explanation of why this cruel policy is so clearly counter to God’s Word.

The crescendo of outrage at the sheer inhumanity of family separation forced Donald Trump to retreat and sign an executive order that he claimed would end family separation. The fact that our society showed itself still capable of moral outrage sufficient to reverse Trump’s course provides some hope for the future. But Trump’s executive order was insufficient and flawed—it merely set the stage for a more difficult but equally important fight to end the inhumane treatment of migrants at the border. Trump’s rhetoric since then, such as tweeting that undocumented immigrants will “infest our country,” makes clear that he intends to continue to stoke racist and xenophobic sentiments toward immigrants as an election issue.

The Trump administration now wants to detain families indefinitely in facilities that resemble prison camps and is trying to get courts to lift the 20-day limit for keeping children in adult detention facilities. The so-called zero-tolerance policy for families at the border amounts to a

zero-compassion policy, and it has to be stopped.

There are practical and proven methods for ensuring that migrants seeking asylum have their cases fairly adjudicated and show up for their day in court, including electronic monitoring and assigning case workers to families. While far from ideal, this is a much more humane option. Children do not belong in prison—full stop. The fact that their parents committed the misdemeanor offense of unauthorized entry doesn’t change that. Such misdemeanors in no way justify the lasting harm of separating children from their parents.

Congress urgently needs to step in. Trump and his administration have demonstrated over and over that they simply do not possess the empathy or decency to treat immigrant families humanely, and they cannot be trusted to do so under current law. Congress should act to prevent this or any future president from using an inhumane zero-tolerance policy toward migrants crossing the border. Congress must also compel the administration to swiftly reunify families separated under this disastrous policy and forbid the separation of parents from children in any circumstance except when the parents themselves endanger a child’s well-being.

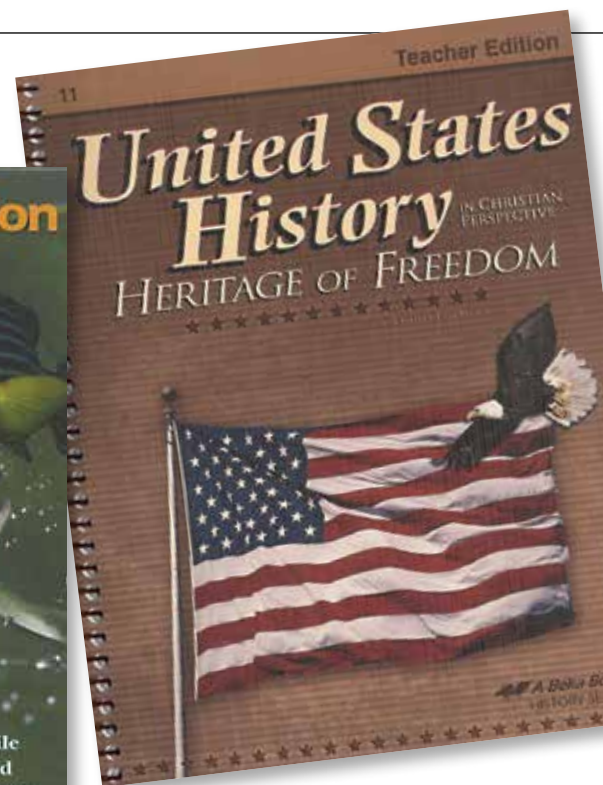
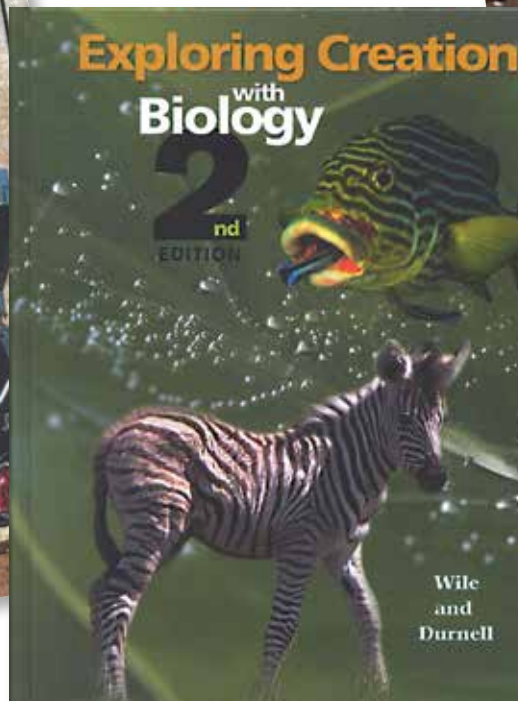
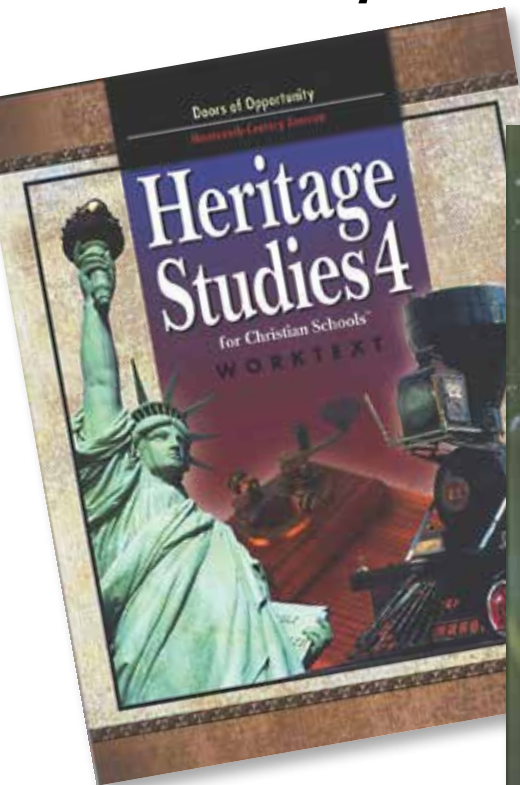
Scripture is authoritatively clear on the obligation of Christians to treat “strangers” as we would treat Christ himself; to love our neighbors, especially those who are different from us, as ourselves; and to take special care of vulnerable children. We can do no other than to fight for a country that treats immigrants with empathy and compassion, tempering justice with mercy for these beloved children of God. ■

Jim Wallis is editor-in-chief of Sojourners magazine.

Children do not belong in prison—full stop.

system that is long overdue for comprehensive, just, and compassionate reform. Family separation was the direct consequence of the Trump administration’s “zero tolerance” policy toward immigrants, some of whom were following the legal path of pursuing asylum. Administration officials argued that forcibly separating children from their parents was acceptable because it would be a “deterrent” to families seeking to enter the United States without proper authorization.

FOR MANY PEOPLE of faith, the atrocity was compounded when Attorney General Jeff Sessions and White House Press Secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders decided to abuse scripture in their attempts to justify



Textbooks from homeschooling publishers Bob Jones University Press, Apologia, and Abeka.

By D.L. Mayfield

School of Lies

Christian homeschooling texts are based on the idea that white Protestants should oversee our world.

WHEN DID YOU realize your textbooks lied to you?

I grew up in the Pacific Northwest and was homeschooled by my mother, the wife of a conservative Christian pastor. I didn't think too much about my education until the 2016 election when I became increasingly alarmed by the enthusiastic support white evangelicals gave to Donald Trump. When Trump ascended into office, riding in on the phrase "Make America Great Again," my memory was pricked. I had heard all this before.

To check it out, I obtained two history textbooks that I had used growing up. In 1999, when I was a sophomore in high school, 1.7 percent of the U.S. population was homeschooled. By 2012, the percentage had doubled. When I was homeschooled, there were three prominent curriculum producers for Christian homeschooling: Abeka Press, Bob Jones University Press, and Accelerated Christian Education. Abeka remains the most popular. Officials at Abeka, according to the *Orlando Sentinel*, would not say how many textbooks the company sells

or release the number of schools that use their curriculum, but said that "it is safe to say that millions of students" have used the materials.

I was one of those millions. In rereading my textbooks, I was shocked at the blatant distortions. According to these texts,

In rereading my textbooks, I was shocked at the blatant distortions.

America was a wilderness until discovered by white European Protestants. The "Natives" rejected God and therefore weren't blessed. The Constitution and Founding Fathers were all but sacred. The Civil War was unfortunate because it splintered our once great nation, taking God's blessing away. Slavery was wrong, yes, but it wasn't that bad because it helped make America what it was. The modern age is rife with problems (including public housing, welfare, and more), most of them stemming from "humanists" and "liberals."

Beneath these repeated themes is the

persistent pressure on the reader to take America back, to return to America's political roots, to make America what it once was. And that America, pre-Civil War, most certainly used to be great, in the eyes of these textbook writers.

Scholars call this brand of belief "dominion theology." Dominionists train conservative Christians to be leaders of a world uncorrupted by the evils of modernity and liberalism and to affirm that America was founded upon a biblical morality that is supreme above all others.

IT'S UNCLEAR whether Donald Trump was aware of how effective a dog whistle "Make America Great Again" would be to a conservative Christian base. By one account, Trump has been fascinated at the seemingly unshakeable support from a group that used to stand for traditional morality and family values. It turns out that the strongest value among this segment might be the one still not taken seriously enough: the dream to "return"

Our Mission

The mission of *Sojourners* magazine is to inspire hope and action by articulating the biblical call to racial and social justice, life and peace, and environmental stewardship.

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to an America where white conservative Christians are in charge.

In light of the U.S. political landscape today, the twisting of history in my textbooks is glaring. The way the texts praise Confederate generals for holding Bible studies for their slaves. The way they blame Martin Luther King Jr. for his own death. The setting up for a culture war where conservative Christians are battling to reclaim what was once theirs. Thanks to textbooks like those I was raised on, many people continue to believe the United States is on the right track.

By Rosemarie Henkel-Rieger

Whose Side Are We On?

Starting with an analysis of power and privilege is like building on rock.

WITH LABOR DAY approaching and November elections weighing down on us, it is a good time to reflect on the economic predicament of the working majority—those of us who work for a living to support our families. But if both voters and candidates do not clearly understand how the current economic situation impacts them, who benefits, and what alternatives are possible, then voting will not create much change.

Every day it becomes clearer that our current political-economic system, called neoliberal capitalism, enriches the wealthiest few while the proverbial “99 percent” struggles with four decades of stagnant wages, never-shrinking college and credit card debt, a scarcity of affordable housing and accessible public transportation, a lack of comprehensive health care, unpredictable, on-demand work schedules, failing and systematically defunded public education and infrastructure systems, and the exclusion of large sections of the population through incarceration, racism, impoverishment, illness, disability, and inadequate education.

We need serious discussions in our churches, communities, workplaces, and union halls about the U.S. economy. Is the system working for us? Does it have to be this way? As we build awareness about the economic situation based on an analysis

I was lied to, as were millions of other children. Until we take seriously the dominionism underlying much of conservative Christian teaching of history, the U.S. will remain under the sway of people who believe it is a God-given premise that white, land-owning Protestants should oversee our world. Until the lie is unearthed, white evangelicals will continue to follow anyone who promises to make America “great” again. ■

D.L. Mayfield, author of Assimilate or Go Home, lives in Portland, Ore.

of power for people who have to work for a living, we can start to ask: “Whose side am I on?” and “Whose self-interest aligns with mine?” This is the beginning of practicing solidarity. If we want change, then we need each other. As the Apostle Paul writes in Corinthians, “If one member suffers, all suffer together with it.” In the labor movement we say, “An injury to one is an injury to all.”

Analyzing privilege and power involves mapping out who wields power—asking what social structures are created to divide us, what social structures are created to make it easier to support the status quo, and who is pitted against whom for division and control.

Our analysis must make clear that not everyone is affected to the same degree. People of color, women, migrants, and LGBTQ communities are impacted to a much greater extent than are white and middle-class people. Those most impacted need to be at the center of the analysis, the struggle, and the solutions.

Faith groups have the advantage of already being organized for mobilization. They can leverage a good amount of social capital in our society. They have a biblical mandate to work for justice. They want to do good. Most important, people of faith have the moral authority to offer critiques of capitalism. Often they can criticize it

Faith groups can leverage a good amount of social capital.

From the Archives

September 1984

An Upside-Down World

OUR government has taken the stance that Salvadoran “illegals” are economic, not political, refugees, and therefore have no right to be here. Despite stories and statistics to the contrary, our government doesn’t believe they have a “well-founded fear of persecution” that would entitle them to political asylum here. Meanwhile refugees keep coming with the same story of their government’s organized killing and repression. Where are our ears to hear and to respond? I am appalled at the inhumanity I see. I am standing in the belly of the beast, a monster we’ve created. ...

The core that sustains me is the still, small voice. It is God whom I wish to hear. The small voice encourages me to live out my faith—the biblical mandate to love. I am not to love in mere words. I am to put my body where my mouth is. It’s an upside-down world these days. But a right-side-up world happens when I lay down my life, risk myself out of love for my brothers and sisters. I am not to close my heart to them, or to anyone.

This earth is a sacred place—it and all the life it contains. We have created refuges to protect the life that we in our blindness destroy: bird refuges, endangered species lists, houses for battered women, places safe from violence. At one time this country was a refuge for people fleeing persecution. Where now is the refuge for those people? ■

Stacey Merkt was a lay worker at Casa Romero, a halfway house for refugees in San Benito, Texas, when this article appeared.



more effectively than can a union leader, politician, or celebrity.

Let’s have the tough conversations about what is happening to workers, to the 99 percent who are benefiting less and less from the economic gains they help to create. Let’s deepen our solidarity with those injured by out-of-control capitalism.

Starting with an analysis of power and privilege is like building on rock—all the following steps and actions will have a solid

foundation. We can build power to resist and replace unjust systems, but we must ask first: Whose side are we on? ■

Rosemarie Henkel-Rieger, co-founder of Southeast Center for Cooperative Development, is a labor organizer and lecturer in Nashville, Tenn. With Joerg Rieger, she is coauthor of Unified We Are A Force: How Faith And Labor Can Overcome America’s Inequalities.

By Christina Colón

#InternsToo

Interns are vulnerable to sexual harassment at work. Can churches model a better way?

THE #METOO movement against sexual assault and harassment has empowered many people in the workplace to speak out. But there’s one group still fighting to be heard: interns—the semi-skilled students and recent graduates seeking supervised practical experience in a profession and who form the backbone of many government, nonprofit, and religious organizations.

In March, Vox caused an uproar when it released copies of a nondisclosure agreement required of all congressional interns. Notably missing was an “exception for incidents of harassment, discrimination, or abuse.” *The Washington Post* reported that interns who came forward about sexual harassment in California, Oregon, Nebraska, and Massachusetts all had their cases dismissed, “leaving them in legal limbo.”

The absence of legal workplace protection is only one reason interns are dissuaded from reporting harassment. A second is lack of power. Internships are

generally temporary and unpaid. Interns fall in a hierarchical gray area that leaves them particularly susceptible to exploitation and harassment.

In a *USA Today* commentary headlined “Dear interns, we’re sorry. We should have warned you about sexual harassment,” Jill Geisler of Loyola University Chicago wrote: “We’ve learned that workplace sexual misconduct is about abuse of power. And those with the least power are the most vulnerable.”

The Bible is full of cries to protect the vulnerable. It warns against seeking power over others. Yet Anglican Bishop Peter B. Price notes that “abuse of power is one of the greatest temptations for Christian leaders”—the consequence of which is not just scandal, “but the loss of a unique corporate authority, achieved by mutual self-giving.”

Last February, Orangewood Church in Maitland, Fla., placed head pastor Jeff Jakes on leave after a former church intern reported that he harassed and emotionally abused her when she was 18 and under his supervision. In an interview with the *Orlando Sentinel*, she said, “I’ve never been back to a Presbyterian church, and I seriously doubt that I ever will.”

Christians can lead the way in modeling best practices in the workplace—whether secular or ecclesial. Leaders should question nondisclosure agreements, ask if interns are covered by the same



Congressional interns in 2016.

Eddie Bernice Johnson

personnel policies as full-time employees, and establish a no-tolerance policy on sexual harassment.

Leaders can establish, articulate, and model clear policies. In working with interns, employers should create an office culture of respect and familiarize interns with office culture and acceptable behavior, include interns in staff meetings and trainings, provide interns with roles that allow them to work with employees at all levels of the institution, give interns meaningful assignments that advance the mission, establish clear learning agreements and revisit them, check in with interns often and intentionally, and always ask how they can support the interns' goals.

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act prohibits employers from discriminating against employees based on sex, race, national origin, and religion. While Title VII does not

“Those with the least power are the most vulnerable.”

legally include unpaid employees, employers have the authority and ability to apply policies such as these to anyone working for them, including interns. At least seven states have granted interns “employee” status to extend them legal protections against workplace harassment.

Internships are one way we train future leaders. Young adults learn how to be ethical workers, mentors, and supervisors through the internship experience. First Peter offers direction to elders to “tend the flock of God that is in [their] charge.” Those with power should “exercise oversight, not under compulsion but willingly ... [and] not for sordid gain” (5:2).

In the era of #MeToo, an effective internship experience must include an education on how to recognize and report sexual harassment. It is not only crucial to establishing a healthy workplace but also critical to our mission as people of faith in building a compassionate and equitable world. ■

Christina Colón is an editorial assistant for Sojourners magazine.

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VIDEO



Rev. Brittany Caine-Conley,
lead organizer of Congregate
Charlottesville, at The
Summit 2018

Rebekah Fulton/Sojourners

Jesus and Oppressors

"Jesus was not civil," Rev. Brittany Caine-Conley told participants at The Summit 2018 hosted by Sojourners. "Jesus was kind to those who were oppressed and marginalized—he healed them—but he was not nice to those oppressors, not one bit. That's why they lynched him on a cross." You can hear more conversations from The Summit—including Caine-Conley—at summitforchange.com/watch.

QUOTED

“Many of our economic arrangements are simply tradeoffs to continue the practices of slavery.”

— **Walter Brueggemann**
on Jesus' alternative to empire
sojo.net/alternative

INTERVIEW



Reesheda
Graham-
Washington
and Shawn
Casselberry

Soul Care 101

In progressive Christian circles, there's a lot of emphasis on challenging evangelicalism around its lack of justice-oriented teachings," explain Reesheda Graham-Washington and Shawn Casselberry. "And rightly so—a gospel that saves souls for the afterlife with little thought or concern for the injustices being perpetuated against bodies here and now is a horrendous oversight.

"But there's something missing in our social activism when we neglect our souls," they continue. "Activism is not enough to sustain us; we need spiritual practices, healing spaces, and community." Here are some of their tips for soul care in justice work:

Take care of your body. Because we are integrated beings, soul care is body care: resting, drinking water, having good nutrition, sleeping well, and being physically active.

Learn when to say no. Needs are always around us, but setting boundaries prevents burnout and keeps us focused on what we can do sustainably.

Form community and collaborate. Forming community can be just as subversive as attending a protest; it motivates us to keep going and not give in to despair when things get difficult.

Commit to the long haul. When we commit, we can take time for ourselves without feeling guilty—developing our capacities and gifts to create a sustained and lasting impact over a lifetime.

Read more at sojo.net/souls.

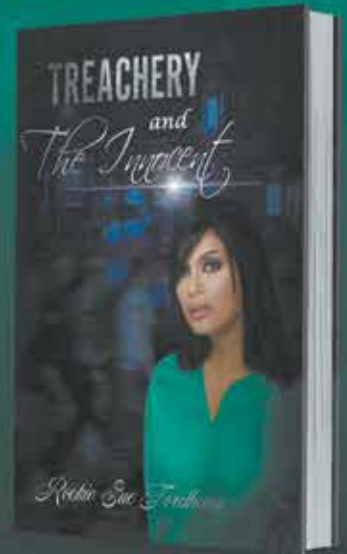
A botched crime paves way to a great escape.

TREACHERY and *The Innocent*

By Rockie Sue Fordham

"I really enjoyed reading this story and cannot wait to see the sequel!"
–Terri Simmons, Amazon customer

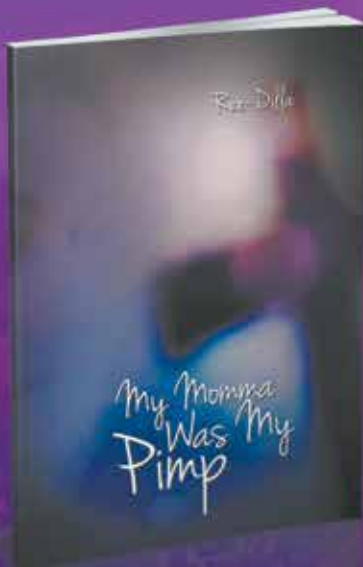
"I started this book while recovering from surgery. I thought I would take the week to read it. I couldn't put it down. I read the book in two sittings. Rockie has a unique way of capturing you inside the story and you feel excitement, fear, triumph, and suspense."
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By Ree-Dilla

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Bunker Busting

ISSUES RELATED to race were at the center of my growing political consciousness when I was an undergraduate in the 1990s. Two were especially impactful: racism in the criminal justice system and racism in cultural representation.

The Rodney King beating happened when I was in high school, and there was almost nothing said about it in the largely white, professional, middle-class suburb where I grew up. In fact, the remarks that I do remember were sympathetic to the police.

The crew I ran with in college changed all that. They raised questions such as: Do you think if the officers were black and the person being beaten was white that the national conversation would be the same? Do you think that the contin-

uous portrayals of black people as criminals had nothing to do with the acquittal of the police officers?

police officers in Baltimore, it was also the year that a grand jury cleared a white police officer who shot and killed Tamir Rice, a 12-year-old boy carrying a pellet gun. Do I even have to say that Tamir was black?

I could not help but connect these black deaths with the #OscarsSoWhite movement. As in the past, the nominees for Academy Awards were almost all white, this in a year where Ava DuVernay's remarkable film *Selma* was eligible.

Every morning I would wake up and check in on the latest twists and turns of these two related stories, #BlackLivesMatter and #OscarsSoWhite.

Then one morning, I read an article on a study done by Princeton economists Anne Case and Angus Deaton. The focus was on middle-age, working-class white Americans, and the key finding was that their death rates were rising, not falling. The causes? Suicide, alcoholism, and opioids. I had to read the article three times before it registered.

Slowly, I realized that these kinds of things don't happen overnight. The spike in the mortality rate was just the most dramatic consequence of a set of trends that had been occurring for decades—the move from an industrial economy to a knowledge economy, the renaissance of cities and the decline of rural America. These were trends that benefited people like me but devastated others. I had viewed my own success as both earned and

inevitable, and I hadn't even thought of this other group at all.

The Case/Deaton study was just the beginning, of course—the election of Donald Trump was a much bigger wakeup call.

I feel as if I had lived in a bunker that I thought was the world, and now I have wandered out and see that while the various concerns of my own bunker are entirely justified (I certainly don't think #BlackLivesMatter and #OscarsSoWhite are any less important than I did before), the landscape is full of different bunkers, each with its own set of justified concerns and its own inclination to view itself as the world.

I believe the role of the bridge-builder during these times is to expand his/her own set of sympathies to encompass more bunkers and encourage relationships among various tribes that call their bunkers the world.

This is easier said than done. When I reach out to those who are clearly not in my bunker, I hear people shout, "Go away, alien." And when people in my own bunker see me reaching out, I hear them yell, "You are no longer one of us, traitor."

Am I the only one? Will it always be like this? ■

Eboo Patel, founder of the Interfaith Youth Core, writes about pluralism from his perspective as a Muslim American.

I hear people yell, "You are no longer one of us, traitor."

uous portrayals of black people as criminals had nothing to do with the acquittal of the police officers?

Those kinds of questions shifted my worldview—for the better, I believe. Given that, it should come as no surprise that the news stories I paid the most attention to in 2015 were about issues of race, the criminal justice system, and cultural representation. Basically, I was consumed with #BlackLivesMatter and #OscarsSoWhite.

And there was a lot to follow in those stories. Not only was 2015 the year that Freddie Gray was killed by





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White supremacists stand behind their shields in Charlottesville, Va., last year.



Reuters

The Silence Was So Loud

I DID NOT leave my church on a whim.

It actually took me and my spouse two years to slowly rip the bandage off and leave. After more than a decade of sitting on the left side of the sanctuary, serving on the worship team, starting a drama group, learning the language of the denomination and congregation, pricing countless items at the annual rummage sale, and teaching confirmands, we decided it wasn't the church. It was us.

It wasn't about what was said or wasn't said on a single Sunday after yet another national tragedy or shocking event. It wasn't

was real for us and our family, week after week, month after month, year after year. We were asked to bring a dish for the cultural potluck, but not too much, so our feelings wouldn't be hurt if people didn't like what we brought. (I'm sorry: If you are going to pit Korean pot stickers against rice pudding, I'm putting my money on my store-bought pot stickers. Every. Single. Time. Veggie pot stickers with rice paper dough, just so you know.)

We were told to be patient while also being asked to read the Pentecost passage in Korean—you know, for diversity. We were told in so many little ways, over long years, that our presence was welcome, but a little uncomfortable.

But we stayed. We desired to be rooted in a local church where our children would, and did, see classmates on Sunday and at school. We wanted to be rooted in a local church even though we knew anything remotely local meant white suburban. We stayed because we thought we knew what we signed up for. We stayed because the family of Christ is imperfect, but full of grace. We stayed because we made friends and lost them when they left. We stayed because there was genuine loss and joy. We

stayed because we are imperfect.

And then the straw that broke our hearts was the 2017 Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Va., where white supremacists armed with torches marched and chanted, "White lives matter," "You will not replace us," and "Jews will not replace us," while police silently watched. President Donald J. Trump's comments condemned "hatred, bigotry, and violence on many sides" as well as chided that there were "very fine people on both sides." The optics of white crowds carrying torches surely would not be ignored.

So we went to church that following Sunday, hoping—as only Jesus followers can hope—to hear words that would acknowledge our pain and grief. But we didn't hear those words. Maybe others did, the others who have stayed and flourished. We didn't, so we left. It was us.

We got a card in the mail the other day, handwritten by someone on behalf of the church, which we left a year ago. A year of silence finally broken. ■

*Kathy Khang is a writer, speaker, and coffee-drinker in the north suburbs of Chicago and author of *Raise Your Voice*.*

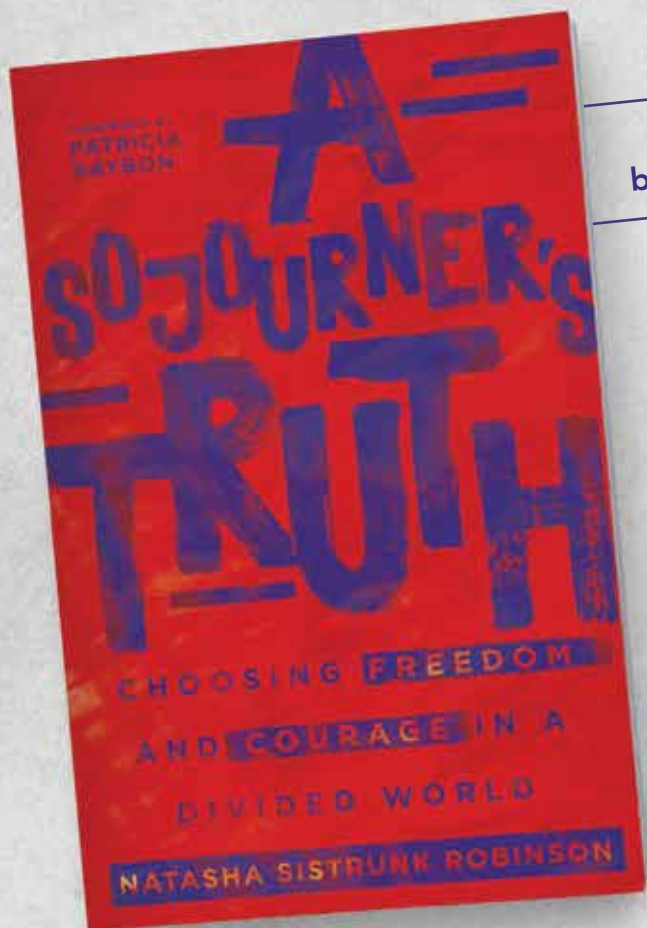


The optics of white crowds carrying torches surely would not be ignored.

one sermon or one congregational prayer. It was a long silence over years—silence from the pulpit, silence from the hymns and contemporary love songs to Jesus and God, silence from the congregation even when the denomination tried to make a sound, silence as #BlackLivesMatter trended, silence after #Charleston.

The silence was so loud, it almost drowned out the painful words that were spoken. They attempted to diminish and ignore the pain that

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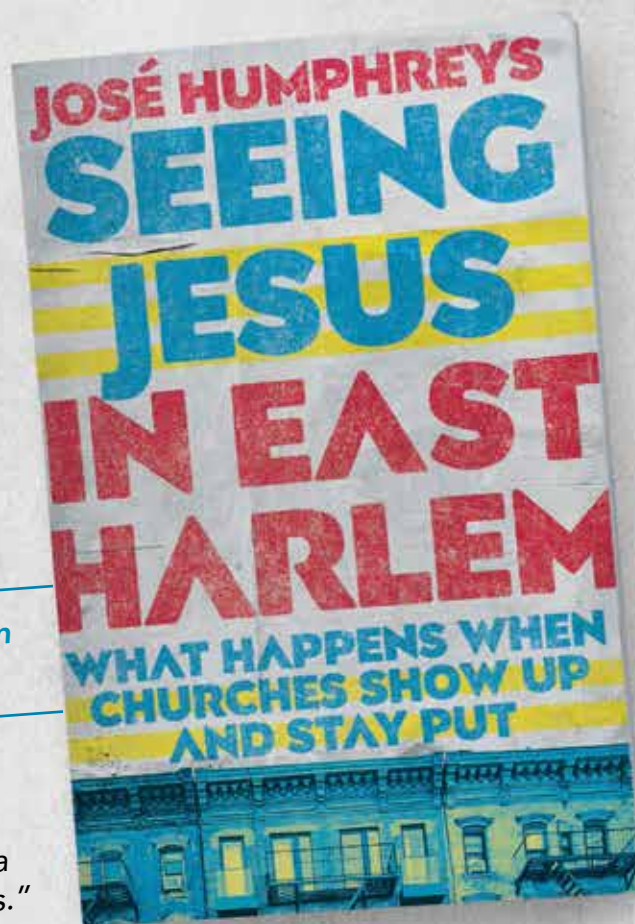


A Sojourner's Truth
by Natasha Sistrunk Robinson



"A sojourn well worth the taking."

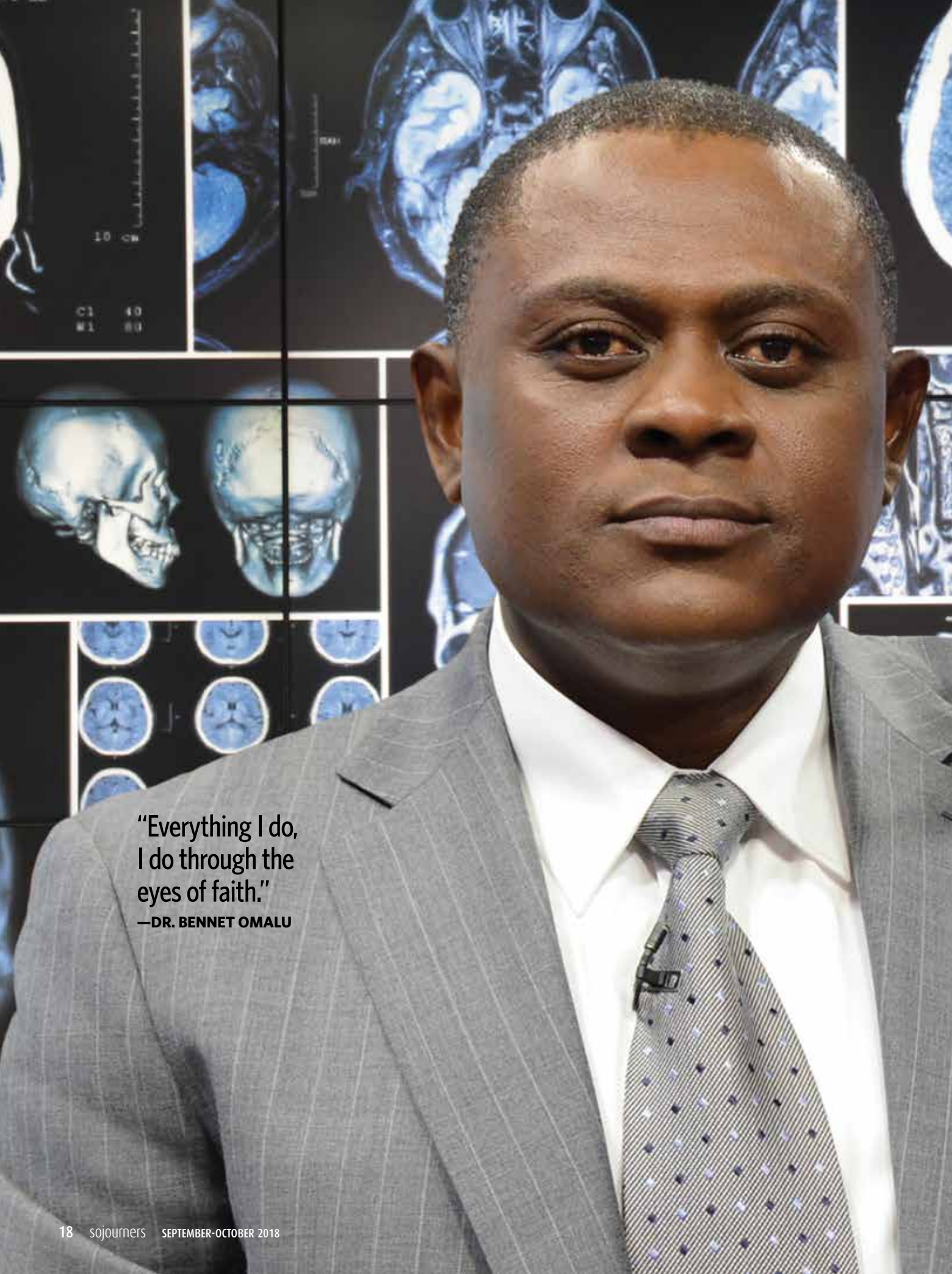
—Lisa Sharon Harper,
founder and president of Freedom Road



Seeing Jesus in East Harlem
by José Humphreys

"A biblically and theologically robust vision of an embodied church that should provide a guidepost for the next generation of churches."

—Soong-Chan Rah,
author of *Prophetic Lament*



"Everything I do,
I do through the
eyes of faith."

—DR. BENNET OMALU



Dr. Bennet Omalu's discoveries about brain injuries from football are causing many parents to rethink their stance toward America's most violent sport.

A Deal with the Devil

by **BRADFORD WILLIAM DAVIS**

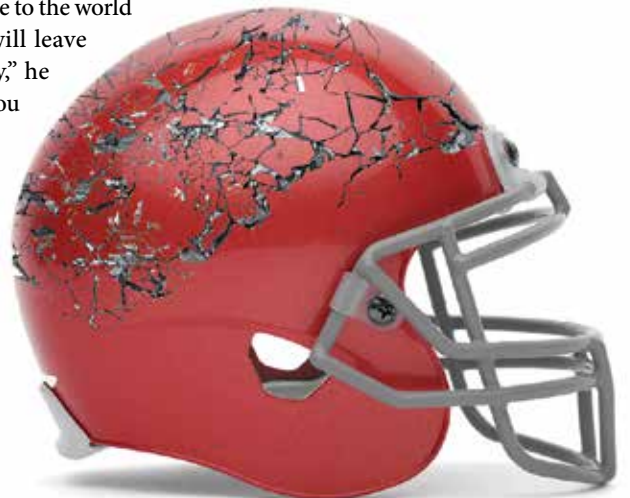
DR. BENNET OMALU is well-acquainted with gruesome deaths. "Some people wake up in the morning, put on their suits, go to offices, and to do things associated with life, with living. But me," Omalu says from behind the office desk in his Sacramento-area home, "I dress up, I go to work to do things associated with the greatest weaknesses of [humanity]."

A forensic pathologist and neuropathologist who earned degrees in his native Nigeria and in various schools across the U.S., Omalu was most recently in the news for performing an independent autopsy on Stephon Clark, an unarmed black man killed in his own backyard. Omalu's work confirmed that Clark was shot in the back six times by Sacramento police.

Omalu is best known, however, for the startling discovery he made after performing an autopsy on former NFL player Mike Webster. As chronicled in the 2015 film *Concussion*, with Will Smith starring as Omalu, the then-medical examiner in Pittsburgh found Webster had chronic traumatic encephalopathy, a degenerative brain disease caused by repeated blows to the head—the kind of blows to the head you ought to expect when playing tackle football.

But despite his daily proximity to death, Omalu, a committed Catholic, has nothing but gratitude. "I am blessed because I encounter death every day ... I came to the world naked, cold, and lonely, and I will leave the world alone, cold, and lonely," he explains. "When you realize that, you begin to think of powers, realities, dimensions that are beyond you."

Omalu is precise and careful with his words. When he says, "I let the Spirit of God percolate into my being," I half expect to hear his celestial brew bubble. "Everything I do, I do through the eyes of faith."



"We shouldn't let children play football because we are damaging their brains and robbing them of their humanity. That is a fact."

Omalu doesn't seem to be exaggerating; his Christian beliefs and morals permeate his outlook on everything. Early in our conversation, he asks if I'm a Christian writer, and I try to say I'm more like a Christian who writes, but Omalu isn't one to thread the needle between competing postmodern definitions of Christian vocation. The Bible on his desk is as important to him as any medical textbook—and based on its proximity to his laptop, he might use the Bible more often.

And it's with this same precision that Omalu offers an uncompromising assessment of the sport running U.S. recreational life each Saturday and Sunday (plus Monday nights on ESPN, Fridays if you're in high school, and it's even trying to make Thursdays a thing) for about six months out of the year.

He says, with the utmost clarity and conviction, "It is not of God."



American gladiators

In 2003, several months after he performed an autopsy on former Pittsburgh Steeler Mike Webster, Omalu took a closer look at the Hall of Fame player's brain, which had been preserved on slides for further study. Webster died of a heart attack but had undergone severe physical and psychological turmoil in his final years, often shocking himself repeatedly with a police-grade Taser gun to calm his nerves. When placed under a microscope, the man's brain looked unlike anything Omalu had seen.

"These slides did not appear like they should belong to a 50-year-old man," Omalu writes in his memoir, *Truth Doesn't Have a Side*. "Each slide contained numerous brain cells, yet many had died and disappeared. ... A large number of the remaining cells appeared shriveled, as if in the midst of the throes of death."

He later understood this brain to suffer the condition we now know as chronic traumatic encephalopathy, or CTE. The young Pittsburgh-based pathologist



published his findings, and the rest of his world turned upside down. In 2006, the NFL's concussion committee, a group that curiously did not have a single neuropathologist, demanded that he retract his statement. The Steelers' team physician, Dr. Joseph Maroon, dismissed Omalu's research as "purely speculative" and "not appropriate science."

Nonscientists weighed in, too. Indianapolis Colts' owner Jim Irsay compared the risks of playing football to taking aspirin.

Media smears provoked anonymous racist attacks, with devastating consequences for Omalu's personal life with his wife, Prema Mutiso. "Phone calls started coming to the house—threatening calls," Omalu wrote. "People told me to go back to the jungle where I had come from. They threatened me and my family. I then started noticing cars following me. And I wasn't just being paranoid."

Omalu traces some similarities between his life and that of St. Telemachus, an early-church monk believed to have sacrificed his life in protest against a gladiator battle. "In the name of Christ, stop!" the ancient monk yelled at the amphitheater crowd and the contestants battling with sword and shield, drawing their ire and, eventually, their stones.

It's a sobering comparison. But if Omalu was ever concerned that a billion-dollar corporation was attempting to detonate his career, he doesn't show it. He retells the Socratic cat-and-mouse he plays with people concerned for his professional and personal well-being: "People have asked me,

'Bennet—the NFL, you were not afraid?' I asked, 'Afraid of what? Afraid of being caught doing what? What should I be afraid of?' They said, 'Weren't you afraid the NFL could hurt you?'"

Omalu's reply? "Hurt me for what? And if they hurt me, what happens? Did they take my spirit from me? No."

'We are in a public health crisis'

If you ask Omalu today, he'll tell you that you should never,

ever play football again. In his latest book, *Brain Damage in Contact Sports: What Parents Should Know Before Letting Their Children Play*, Omalu argues that no child under the age of 18 should play high-contact sports. He believes the public has an incentive to restrict football the same way the U.S. restricts cigarettes from minors.

When Omalu discusses football, he moves effortlessly between sterile scientific conclusions and moral claims. "We shouldn't let children play because we are damaging their brains and robbing them of their humanity. That is a fact."

The research is in his favor. A 2017 study from Boston University's Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy Center found that playing tackle football before age 12 can double the risk of developing behavioral problems later in life. The study also found that it triples the chance of depression.

Depression underscores Omalu's concerns about football's impact on the human brain. When Omalu was a young man studying medicine in Nigeria, he underwent an intense period of loneliness and despair, which he understands now as depression. That experience gave him a providential connection when he "met" Webster's corpse. "Only those who have suffered depression can understand the darkness that descends upon one's soul," Omalu writes in his memoir. "That's one of the reasons I believe my meeting him was truly an act of God. The Lord himself brought the two of us together, two very different men and yet connected by our battles with the darkness of depression."

Continued on Page 22

More Than Just a Game

Sports, at their best, can instill deeply formative commitments to justice.

by **HELENA M. HANSSON** and **DAVID KECK**

WE LEARN AT a young age that sports depend on fairness. A shared commitment to some degree of justice is required if any game is to continue. Kids playing baseball in a sandlot must agree about whether the ball was fair or foul, or the game falls apart. We complain about bad calls from referees because unjust decisions from officials invalidate the game. Despite numerous abuses, sports have the potential to instill deeply formative commitments to justice.

Although there are terrible examples of abusive coaches, most coaches instill their players with respect for rules, officials, and the opponent, encouraging selfless teamwork and giving more playing time to those working harder in practice. Studies show that athletic performance improves when athletes perceive coaches to be fair. And this formative influence can last for decades: NBA legend Kareem Abdul-Jabbar credits his former college coach, John Wooden, for providing the guidance that led Abdul-Jabbar to become a successful basketball player and lifelong justice advocate. “Coach Wooden taught me a lot about basketball through his words,” writes



Kareem Abdul-Jabbar with coach John Wooden.

“Coach Wooden’s example as a man of unbending moral strength taught me how to be the man I needed to be.”

—Kareem Abdul-Jabbar

Abdul-Jabbar. “But more important, his example as a man of unbending moral strength taught me how to be the man I wanted to be—and needed to be.”

Athletes organized for justice—through teams or players’ unions—have power. Since baseball’s 1968 collective bargaining agreement, professional sports unions have been instrumental in securing distributive justice in the form of fair salaries, arbitration procedures, nondiscrimination policies, safety protocols, and other workers’ rights for players whose excellence earns millions of dollars for teams. In 2017, the U.S. national women’s soccer and hockey teams successfully pressured their organizations to provide them with compensation

and working conditions comparable to their male counterparts.

It is not surprising, then, that former athletes have established numerous organizations dedicated to sports, community service, and civil rights. There are also organizations—from the U.N. and the Vatican to local police departments—that have developed sports programs for some of the world’s 60 million-plus refugees. Some of these programs simply seek to provide some normalcy in terrible camp conditions. Others offer the opportunity to learn local languages or integrate peoples of different cultures. “It was never easy going from one country to another,” said Warshan Hussin, an Iraqi who benefited from a Soccer Without Borders program and attests to the sport’s power to build relationships between people regardless of “where they are from, who they are, how old they are, or the color of their skin.”

We need tangible experiences of justice to know the justice of God. And from Pee Wee to professional leagues, sports can provide such opportunities to prioritize safety, practice fairness, and inspire a hunger for justice. ■

Helena M. Hansson is a graduate student and a member of the women’s soccer team, and David Keck is a chaplain, at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Daytona Beach, Fla.

Playing tackle football before age 12 doubles the risk of behavioral problems and triples the chance of depression.

Continued from Page 20

Why are people compelled to play a sport that, to Omalu, is so obviously linked with unceasing, nearly unbearable physical and emotional pain? Jack Moore, a journalist who suffered brain trauma as a college student while umpiring a Little League baseball game, has chronicled football's history with preventing injury and believes that violence inflicted on the human body is ingrained in the sport's DNA.

"Football has a very specific culture around masculinity and toughness that really demands you hide your pain," Moore told me. He cites former president Teddy Roosevelt, who was an early advocate of football and its ability to fulfill a masculine ideal. "I believe in rough games and in rough, manly sports," Roosevelt said in a 1903 speech. "I do not feel any particular sympathy for the person who gets battered about a good deal so long as it is not fatal."

Today, Moore wonders how many battered men are walking around with nonfatal concussive injuries. But when it comes to exact numbers, Moore can only do back-of-a-napkin calculations; after all, CTE can only be confirmed via autopsy. (CTE may soon be reliably detectable in living people.)

Still, a recent Boston University study found 110 of 111 brains of former NFL players had CTE. The study acknowledged a clear selection bias: Many of the brains were from people who exhibited symptoms of serious brain trauma before they died. But even if we assume the percentage of players with CTE is tiny—for the sake of a thought experiment, Moore suggested one-tenth of 1 percent—and multiply it by the 1.23 million kids in grades six through 12 who played tackle football in 2015, we're looking at more than 12,000 kids with the disease.

"When you're talking about the sheer number of American men that have gone through public school institutionalized football for multiple years," Moore asks, "What kind of risk of CTE are we talking about in the next 20 to 30 years?" To him, the answer is plain: "We are in a public health crisis."

And as Omalu will readily remind you, CTE is not the only degree of brain trauma we should be concerned with. One can have

brain damage without having that specific degenerative brain condition. Omalu argues that 100 percent of people that play football are at risk for head trauma. The Sanford Sports Science Institute estimates that middle school tackle football players receive an average of 250 hits to the head per season. According to researchers from the University of Michigan, that number jumps to 650 for high school players. In a 2016 editorial for the *American Journal of Bioethics*, Dr. Steven Miles and Dr. Shailendra Prasad urge health professionals to call for an end to tackle football programs in public schools.



Brain tissue as a ticket out

Though I love playing football, I embalmed myself in low expectations about my athletic career at an early age. And as someone solidly middle class—as solidly middle class as a black man in America can be—I had other career options.

Yet the median black household has a take-home income close to half that of white households. The average black family's household wealth is about \$140,000, compared to \$919,000 for white families. Could the promise of a free college education and the potential riches of an NFL career sway someone to, in effect, use their brain tissue as currency, whatever the cost?

Let's be clear: The NFL and the NCAA aren't here to fix racial inequality. But it's fair to ask if the league depends on labor extracted from persistent inequality. Even NBA great LeBron James interacted with this dynamic when explaining why he doesn't allow his sons to play football even though he played when he was a kid. "I needed a way out," said James, who this summer signed a \$154 million contract with the Los Angeles Lakers. "My kids don't need a way out. They're all right."

Omalu is keenly aware of this problem himself. "Black men make up about 5 to 6 percent of the U.S., right? But they're 75 percent of the NFL. Why is that?"

Omalu uses two schools near his home, one public and one private, to illustrate why

he thinks football could become a civil rights issue. "The public high school has a big football field. Twice a week in the season, there are so many cars parked. One day I pulled over to find out why there were so many cars. It turned out they were playing football. And I went to look. Over 95 percent of the players were black kids." According to Omalu, the private school nearby may have black kids, but he's not even sure if their school has a football field.

"We are undermining the intellectual capacity of black boys and black men. Mainstream America won't care because it feeds into that narrative that black men are inferior."

Omalu predicts that the criminal behavior one could associate with the effects of CTE will be written off as cultural pathology or inherent intellectual inferiority. "But you were the ones that damaged their minds," he says.

Is God a football fan?

When my father—at the time a self-described radical, leftist, black activist—was in college in the '70s, he liked to needle his Christian peers with disingenuous "gotcha" games about everyday moral quandaries. The one he remembers the most went something like:

Dad: Hey, friend! You're a Christian, right?"

Friend: Yeah ...

Dad: But you like football?

Friend: Yeah, I do.

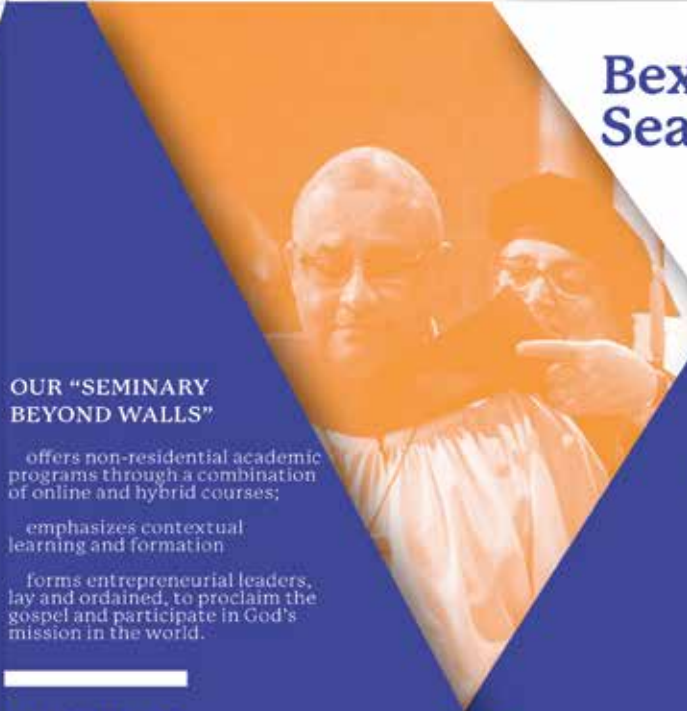
Dad: But wait— isn't football violent? Aren't Christians supposed to be about love and peace and goodwill? How could you root for people to injure someone?

He'd close it off by asking if Jesus would really cheer people on while they harmed each other.

Omalu tries not to judge people for watching football. Yet to anyone endeavoring to live a moral, convictional, and, most of all, Christian life, his charge is this: "If the way of the world is telling you: 'Love football,' but the Spirit of God is telling you, 'This is not good,' which will you listen to?" ■

Bradford William Davis is a writer in New York.





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What You Have Done In the Dark...

A truth commission in North Carolina shines light on CIA torture.

by JOYA WESLEY



Officially registered as business charter jets, two aircraft based at North Carolina's rural Johnston County Airport—a Gulfstream V and a Boeing 737 with the original tail numbers N379P and N313P—secretly conducted some ghastly “business.”

They were U.S. “torture taxis” in the years after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.



The company was a respected presence in the community—and a CIA front.

Playing a key role in the CIA's "extraordinary rendition," detention, and interrogation program, the two aircraft flew at least 34 separate "rendition circuits" that resulted in the kidnapping, imprisonment, and torture of at least 49 individuals, according to the U.K.-based Rendition Project, a coalition of academics, human rights investigators, legal teams, and investigative journalists who waded through reams of data, including falsified and redacted flight plans and other reports, to uncover the truth about the CIA program and its victims.

A typical flight circuit, according to The Rendition Project, went like this:

✈ A jet would take off from Johnston County Airport, about 30 miles south of Raleigh, and fly to Washington, D.C., to pick up the CIA "snatch team."

✈ It would then fly across the Atlantic and stop for refueling somewhere in Europe.

✈ The next stop would be the pick-up location, often in Afghanistan or Pakistan, but also in Egypt, Gambia, Morocco, Malawi, Iraq, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Djibouti, Macedonia, and elsewhere.

✈ Dummy flight plans would often be filed to obscure the true drop-off destinations, which included the Guantánamo Bay detention center in Cuba, CIA "black sites" in Poland, Romania, Afghanistan, and Lithuania—and one in Thailand that was run by now CIA director Gina Haspel.

✈ After delivering the prisoner, the plane would fly to a "rest and relaxation" location to refuel and to allow the CIA team to recover before being flown back to Dulles Airport near Washington, D.C.

✈ The final leg took the plane and flight crew home to Johnston County.

of whose members and staff provided advice. The independent, nongovernmental torture commission held public hearings in November and December to investigate and encourage public debate about the role North Carolina played in facilitating the U.S. torture program between 2001 and 2006.

"For these advocates in North Carolina and across the country to help expose the secret detention and rendition operations of our own government, they are taking on the sacred cow that says governments can do whatever they want in the name of national security," said Rev. Ron Stief, executive director of the National Religious Campaign Against Torture. "Their actions couldn't be more biblical," said Stief.

War crimes in your backyard

What began as whispered rumors became documented fact with reports from *The New York Times* and the 7,000-page report on CIA torture released by the U.S. Senate Intelligence Committee in December



2014. The truth about Johnston County Airport-based Aero Contractors, whose leaders were respected members of the community, was that it was a CIA front company.

Christina Cowger, an agricultural researcher, and Allyson Caison, a realtor, formed the group North Carolina Stop Torture Now in 2005. The group's initial activities included writing letters of apology to victims, airport demonstrations, adopting the road in front of Aero Contractors for trash pickup, telling the stories about victims, and—every month for four years—speaking at the meetings of the Johnston County board of commissioners to call for an accountability investigation. Those calls, as did similar ones made to state officials, went unanswered for so long that members formed the commission on torture to create public, civil society accountability.

The commission's stated purpose is "to do the job that their government refuses to do: investigate North Carolina's involvement in the U.S. torture program and its resulting obligations under international treaties and domestic law."

For more than a decade, a group of citizens in North Carolina have been tracking the inconvenient truth about how their state was complicit in torture. The knowledge that their tax dollars supported torture infrastructure, and that government officials were steadfastly turning a blind eye to the need for transparency and accountability, prompted action. In the early days, these citizen groups engaged in "plane spotting," assiduously tracking and reporting tail numbers. Last year, they launched the North Carolina Commission of Inquiry on Torture (NCCIT) to get at the truth.

The commission against torture is following the lead of previous truth commissions, including its own state's Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission and another focused on the 1898 Wilmington race riot—both



North Carolinians protest outside Johnston County Airport, home of aircraft used in rendition flights by the CIA.

Though Aero Contractors has not responded to invitations to address the commission, there have been other high-profile witnesses. In 2001, Alberto Mora was appointed by George W. Bush to be general counsel of the Navy, the most senior civilian lawyer for the U.S. Navy. In that position, Mora received information in December 2002 regarding detainee abuse by the U.S. military at Guantánamo. Even though the allegations fell outside his area of command, Mora “chose to inquire further.” His actions raised the first red flag that the Bush administration had sanctioned the use of torture in interrogation.

When Mora testified before the commission, he described how the administration he served, “gripped by fear and fury after 9/11,” made a terrible mistake in 2002 in granting the CIA permission to use “enhanced interrogation techniques.” In addition to the immorality of using torture, Mora said it also was a strategic policy error, and that it damaged individual victims and our international standing as a nation in lasting and complex ways.

Part of the commission’s work is to disabuse Americans of the widely held view that torture is a “necessary evil,” effective in obtaining useable information. It is not, says Robin Kirk. “Even though every piece of evidence we have shows us that torture not only doesn’t work, that it’s counterproductive, there’s something visceral about it that people just believe,” said Kirk, faculty co-chair of the Duke Human Rights Center and a NCCIT commissioner.

Kirk’s fellow commissioners include retired Col. Lawrence Wilkerson, who served as Secretary of State Colin Powell’s chief of staff from 2002 to 2005; Jonathan Freeman, a Truman National Security Project fellow and former active duty U.S. Army officer who fought in Iraq; and Frank Goldsmith, an attorney who represented five Taliban prisoners held at Guantánamo. During two full days of public hearings in 2017, the commission recorded testimony from torture survivors, former government officials, and legal and human rights experts.



The kidnapped

Mohamedou Ould Slahi, author of *Guantánamo Diary*, was held in Guantánamo without charge or trial for 14 years. According to his testimony and unclassified documents, Slahi was arrested by authorities in his native Mauritania in September 2001 and questioned for two weeks by Mauritanian secret service and U.S. FBI agents. He was released with no charge.

Slahi was asked to come in again for questioning in November 2001, which he did voluntarily. He was then interrogated for eight days. On Nov. 28, a CIA rendition plane run by Aero Contractors transported Slahi from Mauritania to a prison in Jordan.

“I was taken on a plane that had six people beside myself, all Jordanians. I stayed in Jordan for eight months ... under heavy interrogation treatment,” Slahi testified via Skype.

In July 2002, another CIA rendition team picked up Slahi. He was stripped, blindfolded, diapered, shackled, and flown to the Bagram U.S. military base in Afghanistan, where he was interrogated for two weeks. Then Slahi was put onto a military transport with 34 other prisoners and flown to Guantánamo. He entered the detention camp on Aug. 5, 2002, where his torture regimen was overseen by Chicago police detective Richard Zuley and personally approved by U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld. Slahi was finally returned to his family in Mauritania on Oct. 17, 2016.

“I want to say thank you to the people of North Carolina for standing up for people who cannot stand up for themselves,” Slahi told the commission. “This unholy marriage between your [U.S.] Securitate apparatus and dictatorships in this region [North Africa] ... this everlasting relationship has to be broken. It has to stop.”

Khadija Anna Pighizzini also testified via Skype, through an interpreter, from Bergamo, Italy. Her husband, Abou

How did a middle-age, real-estate agent, soccer mom become involved in ending torture?

Elkassim Britel, was 34 years old in 2001 when he left on a five-month research trip to Iran as part of a project to translate a classic commentary on the Quran into Italian. Ten years later, he returned home, gray-haired, anxious, and unable to work. He had been arrested in March 2002 in Lahore, Pakistan, on his return from Iran. "From that day on, Kassim Britel becomes a missing man," said Britel's wife through a translator. He was interrogated and tortured by Pakistani and U.S. officials in such brutal ways that he required medical assistance. He was subjected to threats of death and the rape of women in his family, and he continued to be denied contact with Italian authorities.

Eventually, Britel was blindfolded, put in chains, and taken to an airplane, according to his wife. "The protocol is precise and designed to induce terror in the victim, with the horrible fear that he is about to be killed. Kassim is no exception: He is terrified, he does not understand, maybe his life will end there," she said. His description of the actual rendering—being blindfolded and thrown into the plane, beaten, threatened, his mouth duct-taped, and refused access to a bathroom—corresponded with many other stories. The airplane, the Gulfstream N379P, had departed from Johnston County in North Carolina. It was operated by Aero Contractors and owned by Premier Executive Transport Services; the crew filed false flight plans through a Boeing subsidiary Jeppesen Dataplan, all of whom worked on behalf of the CIA.

'How can we forget them?'

"Between September 2001 and September 2006, our database shows over 800 flights by N379P and N313P," Sam Rafael, The Rendition Project co-director, said in his testimony. "These two aircraft landed hundreds of times at locations known to have played a role in the CIA's torture program."



Mohamedou Ould Slahi was held in Guantánamo without charge or trial for 14 years.

The Rendition Project has the most comprehensive public account of those detained and tortured within the CIA's program and the largest public database of rendition flights by CIA aircraft.

Once "rendered," the victims—many of whom were later determined to have been wrongfully detained—were subjected to waterboarding and other torture tactics that are condemned as immoral by

the 164 states party to the U.N. Convention Against Torture—of which the U.S. has been a signatory since 1988.

Caison, co-founder of North Carolina Stop Torture Now, also testified before the commission. She explained how a self-described "middle-aged, real-estate agent, soccer mom" became involved in working to end torture. "I consider myself an activist; I am a person of faith; and I am a mom," she told the commissioners.

"The activist in me believes that I can change the world while making it a better place and that sometimes my ideas are better than the ones of those in power," Caison said. "As a person of faith, I have to. Right? Once you have the knowledge, you can't ignore the men in cages, left there to be forgotten or die. And as a mother, I like to think if somehow my boys were kidnapped and tortured that there would be another mother out there ... like me, trying to end an injustice that begins in my neighborhood. ... What we do for the least of these, we do for God."

What 'intrinsic evil' looks like

The commission on torture is shining light on these abuses and will do so to an even greater extent with its report, due out this fall. The main objective of faith communities, according to Stief, is "to educate people on what torture really looks like, the impact it has on those who have been tortured, and why it is immoral in every situation and



Justifying the Unjustifiable

'They wrap their Bible in the American flag.'

In the documentary *Discreet Airlift*, filmmaker Johanna Hamilton tells the story of residents of Johnston County, N.C., looking for answers regarding the role their state played in the CIA's torture program. Hamilton interviews Allyson Caison, left, co-founder of North Carolina Stop Torture Now.

"[Johnston County is] a great place to live, except for torture," says Caison. "We are in the thick of the Bible Belt, and one of the things about the Bible Belt is that there are a lot of very conservative Christians. They wrap their Bible in the American flag. And so they justify everything. We had one guy at church tell us that Jesus invented torture. What?" ■

Discreet Airlift, a 15-minute documentary about the North Carolina Commission of Inquiry on Torture, is available at fieldofvision.org/discreet-airlift.

circumstance. A Christian who supports torturing another human being made in God's image, just to somehow feel the illusion of safety, is committing apostasy, not faith."

Ray McGovern, a 27-year CIA analyst turned anti-torture activist who has not been directly involved with the commission, said he was taught during his undergraduate studies at the Jesuit Fordham University that there is a moral category called "intrinsic evil"—actions that are always wrong, including rape, slavery, and torture. He believes more Americans of faith would stand up if they had better, more transparent reporting about torture. The media, "owned and operated by corporations and others that profit and profiteer on secret operations, can deprive Americans of the information necessary to move them to action," McGovern said.

According to commissioner Kirk, the deep racial divide that plagues the United States plays into the question of torture as it does almost everything else. "It's just so persistent and so pernicious," Kirk said, "but we just don't seem to be able to really engage with it," adding that we still must try. "We have to be uncovering the police brutality or unfairness in the schools or whatever, but we also have to have a tremendous amount of patience."

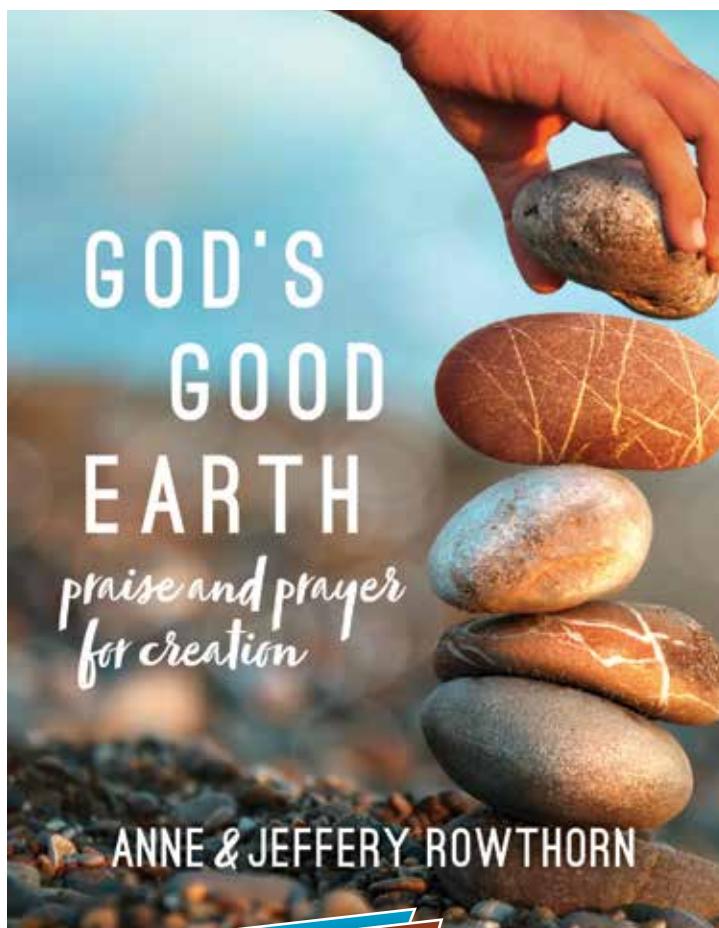
Stief also noted the role of race, and says the faith community must stand up. "With the rendition flights it was almost all Muslims. In our U.S. prisons it's largely black and brown bodies. It all comes from the same mindset of racism and bigotry, and unfortunately that's the mentality that drives the White House right now," he said. "If ever there was a time for the church to raise its voice, now is the time."

Mora hopes the commission's work will help citizens impact national policy, noting that the Trump administration "appears to be inclined to repeat some of the same policy mistakes of the Bush administration."

"The president has communicated his disdain for human rights and has signaled that the U.S. would no longer seek to lead in this area or to conduct our foreign policy consonant with human rights ideals. He may not be torturing, at least not yet, but has declared his support for torture. He has suggested that international law and the laws of war should not bind U.S. military operations. He has signaled his preference for autocrats, such as Vladimir Putin, and a disdain for committed democrats, like Angela Merkel. He prioritizes a brute force approach to international problems while discounting diplomacy. And he is pursuing a strategy he calls 'America First,' but which has been aptly described as 'America Only' or 'America Alone,'" said Mora.

"As was the case with the Bush administration's torture policies, these policies are not aligned with our strategic interests. Because they don't embody our values, they don't represent who we are or who we wish to be," Mora added. "They will not make the U.S. a better country or the world a safer place." ■

Joya Wesley is co-author of Learning from Greensboro: Truth and Reconciliation in the United States.



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A North Korean soldier stands watch at the Demilitarized Zone.

Reuters

To understand why North Korea developed nuclear weapons, one must understand the Korean War—and the armed stalemate across the DMZ since then.

THE WAR That Never Ended



TWO-THIRDS OF A CENTURY after the Korean War, most Americans do not know what happened in that conflict or how it impacts the Korean Peninsula even today. **by INYEOP LEE**

In 1950, North Korea invaded South Korea. The U.N. intervened, and in the three years that followed the U.S. Air Force dropped more tonnage of bombs on North Korea than were used in the entire Pacific theater during World War II, including more than 30,000 tons of napalm. The U.S. destroyed 80 percent of the North's infrastructure and 50 percent of its cities. The capital city of Pyongyang was wiped off the map.

“Over a period of three years or so, we killed off—what—20 percent of the population,” said Air Force Gen. Curtis LeMay, head of the Strategic Air Command during the Korean War. Historians believe that between 70 and 80 percent of the deaths were civilians.



**MORE THAN 80 PERCENT
of South Koreans
support a peace
treaty with
Pyongyang.**

**Above, Donald
Trump and Kim
Jong Un walk
together during
their June summit
in Singapore.**

Nearly 40,000 U.S. soldiers died and more than 100,000 were wounded in what has been a “forgotten war” in the United States. North Koreans, however, have never forgotten the war that resulted in millions of casualties in their country. For 65 years, they have lived under that war’s vivid memory and evolved into one of the most militarized states in the world.

The root causes of the problem

Technically, the Korean War never ended. The armistice treaty signed in 1953 reinstated the government of South Korea, suspended open hostilities, created the Demilitarized Zone, and allowed for the release of prisoners of war, but it was not a permanent peace treaty between nations. No peace treaty has ever been signed. “We have won an armistice on a single battleground—not peace in the world. We may not now relax our guard nor cease our quest,” said President Dwight Eisenhower.

Because of the almost-total devastation of their country in the war, many North Koreans today still have strong anti-American views—and a deep fear of such destruction happening again. The country has built 15,000 underground defense facilities, including the 21-mile Pyongyang subway system that serves as a bomb shelter capable of holding 2 million people. Seventy percent of the North Korean military is deployed along the DMZ. During the Korean War, Gen. Douglas MacArthur considered the use of nuclear bombs over North Korea several times. In 1954, MacArthur confessed that he had a plan in place to use nuclear weapons in North Korea, before he was fired by President Truman.

During the global nuclear arms race between 1947 and 1991, North Korea did not possess nuclear weapons. However, the U.S. stationed tactical nuclear weapons in South Korea between 1958 and 1991. For more than 60 years, the U.S. and South Korea have held annual joint military exercises, some of the largest military exercises in the world. These exercises involve strategic bombers capable of carrying nuclear weapons and hundreds of thousands of soldiers. The U.S. and South Korea see these as defensive measures necessary in the absence of a peace treaty. North Korea fears these are preparations for a nuclear attack.

In the 1960s, North Korea’s economy grew rapidly, with assistance from the Soviet Union, and the country maintained economic parity with South Korea for more than a decade. In the 1980s, South Korea’s economy grew exponentially, while the North stagnated and went backward. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, North Korea lost its key trading partner and Soviet economic assistance. Such external factors, combined with inefficient economic policies and natural disasters, plunged North Korea into a severe economic crisis, which led to famine. An estimated 600,000 to 3 million people died of starvation in North Korea between 1994 and 2000. While South Korea normalized relations with former opponents China and Russia, North Korea never achieved similar recognition from the U.S. or Japan. North Korea’s diplomatic isolation deepened.

For the leaders of North Korea, its nuclear program serves multiple purposes. It guarantees the survival of the Kim regime by providing advanced weapons capability against the U.S. and South Korea’s superior conventional weapons. The nuclear program allows North Korea to convert its rich natural uranium resources into energy. It symbolizes an important Korean value—self-reliance (*juche*)—and legitimates the regime. Finally, it is a powerful bargaining chip for negotiations with Washington.

All these factors may not “justify” North Korea’s nuclear program, but they do help explain the country’s mindset, its existential fear over national survival. The nuclear crisis will not be resolved without addressing the root causes of the problem: ending the Korean War and the decades-long stalemate with a peace treaty.

Three decades of failed negotiations

When the U.S. acquired intelligence on North Korea’s nuclear program in the early 1990s, the two countries started negotiations. Hawkish officials in the U.S.—believing that the North would soon collapse, as had other communist states—were not enthusiastic about the negotiations or others that followed, and they soon broke down.

When North Korea threatened to withdraw from the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty in 1994, a crisis ensued and talks were

Reuters

Spies, Imperialists, and Traitors

In North Korea, Christians are cast as enemies of the state • by JOY YOON

put on hold, but negotiations resumed after former President Carter met with North Korean leader Kim Il Sung in Pyongyang. The Clinton administration reached an agreement with Pyongyang in October 1994, in which both sides pledged to diplomatic normalization and a peace treaty. In November of that year, however, the Republicans swept the U.S. mid-term elections and obstructed the implementation of the deal.

A similar pattern occurred in 1998. North Korea had begun testing long-range missiles, and the Clinton administration reopened negotiations, in collaboration with the newly elected liberal president of South Korea, Kim Dae Jung, with an aim to engage North Korea in denuclearization. Pyongyang halted missile tests and Clinton lifted sanctions against North Korea. Momentum toward peace was upended with the election of George W. Bush in 2000.

Another nuclear crisis began when the Bush administration accused Pyongyang of developing highly enriched uranium. Bush stopped oil shipments to North Korea, the only part of the 1994 agreement the U.S. had implemented. In response, North Korea restarted its plutonium program. Between 2003 and 2008, South Korea and China urged normalized relations between Washington and Pyongyang. As part of the Six Party Talks (which included Japan and Russia), North Korea provided documentation on its nuclear program to the U.S. and televised the destruction of the cooling tower at the Yongbyon nuclear reactor. The U.S. removed North Korea from the list of state sponsors of terrorism and lifted some sanctions. Negotiations broke down, however, when the Bush administration requested a far-reaching verification plan for special inspection and Pyongyang refused. North Korea's leader, Kim Jong Il, had a stroke, and the regime shifted its focus to domestic issues, including the process of leadership succession.

President Obama attempted to restart negotiations with North Korea. But Kim Jong Un, son of the former president, was focused on consolidating his power as a new leader, and North Korea began aggressively testing

IN THIS ATHEIST LAND,
a small crack is
opening for people
with different cultures,
views, and faith.

Christianity is the only religion in North Korea that is considered to be strictly a foreign religion. North Korea considers Christianity to be the forefront of American imperialism. The country is taught that Christian missionaries in the 19th century came to Korea to indoctrinate the people with Western civilization. Then, in the Korean War, the U.S. soldiers who massacred their people were depicted as Christian crusaders. To fan these flames, the largest group of Koreans who opposed communism when the government was established in 1945 was the Christians. Therefore, in North Korea, Christians are likened to spies, foreign imperialists, and anti-government traitors.

Despite this, Christianity has been allowed to persist in North Korea. The vast majority of churches were destroyed during the early years of communism in North Korea, but in 1989 Kim Il Sung brought life back to Christianity by rebuilding the home church of his mother. Since then, two other state churches have been erected: one additional Protestant church and one Catholic church.

In summer 2013, my husband and I hosted our first foreign visitors in our Pyongyang home, friends of the family and supporters of our work. They share our Christian faith. One day, this visiting couple was riding in a car with us as one of our North Korean guides explained the history of the city. All of a sudden he blurted out, "Pyongyang is the birthplace of Christianity in Korea. It was known as

the Jerusalem of the East." We were shocked! Was this North Korean guide actually admitting that Christianity in Korea began in Pyongyang?

As foreigners in North Korea, we have freedom to worship in our own home. So far, no Protestant or Catholic church has been established for foreigners, but foreigners are allowed to attend the services at the officially recognized state churches. We have attended the state churches on practically a weekly basis. These churches have been ridiculed by foreigners as being façades of a church. Foreigners think that the people go through the motions of worship because they are ordered to by the government and not because they choose to believe. However, we are convinced that among the church members, there is a degree of genuine faith.

North Korea is infamous for its lack of religious freedom. But there is a new spirit of religious freedom entering the land. This freedom is primarily for foreigners living in North Korea, but I believe it is a start to something new. In this atheist land, a small crack is beginning to form, broadening tolerance and understanding for people with different cultures, views, and faith. A remnant of religious followers still exists in this communist regime. ■

Joy Yoon, who was born in Illinois and raised mostly in South Korea, lived and worked in North Korea for more than 10 years. This article is adapted from her unpublished book Insights into North Korea: Living a Decade in the DPRK.

Continued on Page 34

CHRISTIAN CHURCHES in South Korea reflect the same political and theological tensions found in U.S. churches.

Continued from Page 33

nuclear weapons and missiles. Two conservative presidents in South Korea refused to engage in negotiations with Pyongyang.

In sum, for the better part of three decades, various factors—from domestic political changes within the countries to difficulties in policy coordination within the U.S. and between the U.S. and South Korea—prevented the kind of long-term, consistent diplomatic efforts that are needed to resolve such complicated international issues.

Kim Jong Un is now more confident in the consolidation of his political power, and he has declared that North Korea has completed its nuclear and missile development. President Trump's top-down approach, ignoring diplomatic protocol and the careful preparations that usually precede high-level meetings—as well as South Korean President Moon Jae In's mediation diplomacy between Washington and Pyongyang—made the Singapore meeting possible. But negotiations could falter again if the United States demands that Pyongyang denuclearize first without seriously addressing an end to the Korean War with a peace treaty. The U.S. should set a realistic goal for denuclearization and simultaneously pursue a peace treaty.

All or nothing?

Washington and Pyongyang view the current standoff through very different lenses. North Korea considers its national security to be at stake. The country sees its choices for survival as either by nuclear deterrence or by exchanging its nuclear program for diplomatic normalization and a peace treaty with the U.S.

Hawks in the U.S., however, view the U.S. as a global police force that must punish North Korea's international crimes. The U.S. has either refused to negotiate with Pyongyang or has set conditions unacceptable to North Korea, such as demanding special inspection rights with unlimited access or that North Korea completely denuclearize itself first, as a precondition to negotiations, without any guarantee of its survival.

In some cases, absolutist impulses in U.S. Christianity have fueled such an approach. Some conservatives identify the North Korean regime as “pure evil.” They believe



this evil will collapse under its own weight. In this view, a few more sanctions and a tighter squeeze will lead to regime change. However, North Korea survived its worst period in the 1990s, and there's no sign of imminent collapse. In fact, military confrontation and added sanctions against North Korea have helped the regime consolidate its power and served as an obstacle to reforms. “All or nothing” approaches and ratcheting up sanctions in the hopes of bringing North Korea to its knees have undermined, rather than bolstered, efforts to resolve the crisis.

China and Vietnam provide, perhaps, better models. When the U.S. started its diplomatic negotiation process with China in the early 1970s, China had developed nuclear weapons and was under the dictatorship of Mao Zedong, who had started the Cultural Revolution that killed millions of people. After diplomatic normalization, China started serious economic reforms and substantial social changes. Similarly, in the 1990s, after the U.S. normalized relations with Vietnam—20 years after the Vietnam War—the country achieved rapid economic growth and has become one of the most pro-American countries in Southeast Asia.

It's time for a peace treaty

So how should the world, and how should Christians, deal with North Korea, with its nuclear programs, its authoritarian regime, and its terrible human rights abuses? Soviet dissident and novelist Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn wrote, “If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good

and evil cuts through the heart of every human being.” It is dangerous to assume “we” are pure good and “they” are pure evil.

As Christians, we are called to be peacemakers. Regardless of all the issues related to North Korea, there is no reason to continue the 65-year-long Korean War.

Christian churches in South Korea reflect the same political and theological tensions and differences found in U.S. churches. Many conservative and evangelical churches are skeptical about doing anything with North Korea. They rightly are critical of the North's human rights abuses, the lack of freedom under the dictatorship, and the country's nuclear development. Liberal and progressive churches in the South are highly focused on reconciling the two societies and building a strong peace. Despite such differences, more than 80 percent of South Koreans support a peace treaty with Pyongyang, even if they don't fully trust Kim Jong Un.

Considering the historical background, it is not difficult to understand why North Korea feels it cannot give up its nuclear weapons without some trustworthy guarantee of peace and regime survival. The worst nightmare for the North Korean leadership is the regime-toppling path the U.S. took with Iraq and Libya. But there is no reason why North Korea cannot follow the path of China and Vietnam, if we successfully exchange a real peace treaty for North Korea's nuclear program and start to socialize North Korea into global society. ■

Inyeop Lee is an assistant professor in politics and history at Spring Arbor University in Michigan and co-author of Politics in North and South Korea.

Breaking the Blue Bowl

I am the tiny, irate, scolding person
standing in the dome of my own skull.
She shakes her head again, arms crossed, again
disappointed: I'm clumsy, struggling, dull.

Then there's the shattered wine glass,
an afternoon misspent, a dinner gobbled,
rank laundry, unpaid bills, uncut grass,
and, I suspect, one lovely friendship bobbled.

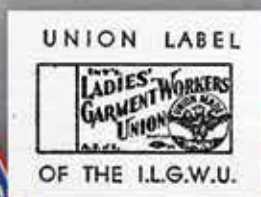
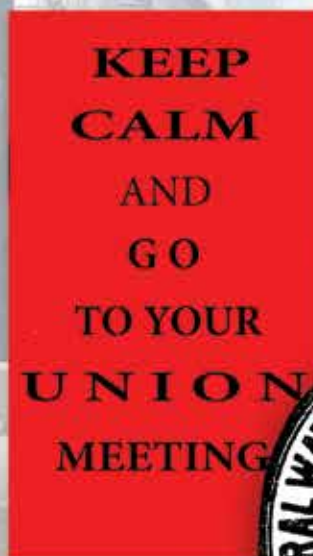
And yet, I'm here. Alive.
These yellow swiveling
leaves, this carnival of wind, make me recall
I'd love my neighbor if I loved myself
better.

The sky's a million geese unraveling
in blue forgiveness. Love the tattered fall.
Forgive yourself.

Jeanne Murray Walker's new collection of sonnets, Pilgrim, You Find the Path by Walking, will be available in 2019. She lives in Merion Station, Pa. (Shutterstock image)



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Make Unions Great Again

In the wake of the Supreme Court's blow against organized labor this summer, Christians should double down in their support of unions • by TONY CAMPOLO

MOST OF US KNOW that there is something drastically wrong with the American economy. In 2017, the richest 10 percent of the population owned 77 percent of the nation's wealth and the 20 richest Americans had more wealth than the entire bottom half of the American population.

What is worse is that the new tax bill passed by President Trump and the Republican Congress will increase this imbalance. By 2027, according to the Tax Policy Center, 90 percent of its benefits will go to the richest of Americans. Because the changes will be incremental, they are not likely to be noticed by the vast majority of citizens until it is too late.

Financing these tax breaks for the rich is being accomplished in three ways. First, there will be cuts in benefits for the middle class, which that will mean less money for higher education, medical programs, and social security. Second, there will be dramatic cuts made to the programs that have heretofore provided a safety net for the poor, including cuts to the food stamps program, Medicaid, and housing subsidies. Third, there will be a huge increase in the national debt.

In April, the Congressional Budget Office reported that the GOP tax bill will add \$1.8 trillion to the deficit over the next 10 years—and more than \$12 trillion to the nation's debt. Interest payments on the debt will mean even less money available for social programs that serve Americans of modest means.

This is not the first time that wealth has come to be concentrated in a small minority of the population. It happened during the Gilded Age, wherein the Leisure Class, as Thorstein Veblen called the very rich, lived in obscene luxury while massive numbers

of Americans suffered from lack of basic sustenance.

There was another concentration of wealth in the upper 10 percent of the nation's population following World War II. That fact, however, was counteracted by the growing power of the labor movement. By 1954, almost 35 percent of all American workers were unionized. They were well-organized and wielded great political power. They were able to gain great benefits not only for union members but for all Americans.

It was the unions that were responsible for getting the government to establish the minimum wage and for getting Congress to legislate safety regulations for factory workers and coal miners. Without unions, it is doubtful that anything would have been done to ensure that companies provided unemployment compensation and medical benefits for their employees. Vacation days and days off for holidays also were granted because of union demands.

The evangelical bias against unions

Conservative churches have tended to oppose unions, sometimes considering them to be oriented toward socialism or even deeming their members to be anti-capitalistic and therefore dangerously unpatriotic. Because corporate executives are often big contributors to religious colleges and universities, faith-based charities, and local churches, there has been a strong tendency for Protestant Christians to view union people

Background photo: Shutterstock

with suspicion. Not surprisingly, therefore, the Republican Party with its pro-business bias has drawn support from conservative Protestant Christians, and at election time the party could count on the votes of the majority of church members. Statistics from the 2016 election demonstrate this. An overwhelming majority of Christians in general voted Republican, with 81 percent of evangelicals voting for Donald Trump.

The bias of evangelicals against unions was testified to by Jay Kessler, once president of Youth for Christ and a former president of Taylor University. Kessler told about being embarrassed among evangelical Christians because his father had been a union organizer, and feeling that his fellow evangelicals looked down on him when they found out. I can remember my own father having to

Americans have been seduced by corporate advertising into buying everything from television sets and automobiles to houses “on time.” The indebtedness of the typical American family has soared, and now very few families have money set aside for retirement or for hard times, if their debts are even paid off. The prospects for the middle class will not be good without strong unions to stand up for ordinary Americans.

The union makes us ... more equal

It is time for the church to recognize that labor is among the principalities and powers it needs to bring under the lordship of Christ. We might begin by looking at Christian higher education. At Eastern University, an activist school committed to social justice, where I have taught for decades, there has been a concerted effort to make business a focus of our curriculum. We have a wide range of courses to prepare our students for the corporate world, with a strong emphasis on clarifying biblically based values and ethics for Christians who are in management. Little to nothing, however, is taught to train students to serve in unions.

What is true about Eastern is probably true about most, if not all, of the evangelical schools that are part of the Coalition of Christian Colleges and Universities. Right now, if a student at a typical Christian university wants to study labor relations and help Christianize unions, their only option would be to transfer and to attend a secular university such as the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania or Harvard Business School, where the value and importance of labor unions are understood and taught.

Some constitutional scholars argue that the survival of our democratic republic is dependent upon reducing the gap between the rich and the poor. Political theorists have contended since the 17th century that truly representative government requires a more-equitable distribution of wealth, and strong unions can play a role in making that happen. Congress, however, is too dependent on special interest groups other than unions to approve changes that could meaningfully lead to a redistribution of America's wealth.

Pastors should preach on how labor unions can be instruments of God for creating a more equitable society that stands on the side of American workers. Seminaries should be teaching courses on how labor unions can contribute to the mission of the church. Denominational convention seminars should help church people understand how unions have helped America live out the requisites of scripture to bring good news to the poor. Churches can do so again if the negative attitudes toward unions among Christians in general, and white evangelicals in particular, can be overcome, and support for organized labor encouraged.

The churches' role

There is little doubt that the church can have a role to play when it comes to dealing with some serious problems within unions. We know that there are cases where unions have protected employment for members who should have been fired. For example, consider reports of school teachers in New York City who were proved to be incompetent or derelict in their duties, yet continued to be paid and receive full benefits because unions demanded it. Such things only provide reasons for the church to step in and exercise a call for righteousness and justice.

Church people remember that unions long have been a progressive force. Check out the civil rights movement of the 1960s and review those photos of union leaders marching with Martin Luther King Jr. and supporting the Poor People's Campaign. Unions have played significant roles in various peace movements throughout the 20th century.

The church should help inspire Christians who belong to unions to be active members who stand up for biblically based justice, not only for its own members but for the good of society in general. It is time for the church to call unions to hold true to their historic ideals, to work to bring about expressions of God's kingdom “on earth as it is in heaven.”

Unions have done so in the past. The time is at hand to make unions in America great again. ■

Tony Campolo is author of more than 35 books, a well-known speaker, and founder of the Evangelical Association for the Promotion of Education.

The prospects for the middle class will not be good without strong unions to stand up for ordinary Americans.

explain to friends at our church that he wasn't a communist just because he was a member of the United Electrical Workers Union. Francis Schaeffer, an intellectual icon of evangelicals, could have testified to the bias against unions among Protestant Christians, himself having been a union organizer at the RCA Victor Corporation in Camden, N.J.

Unions have declined since their high point in 1954, and now only 10.7 percent of American workers are unionized. Were it not for those workers in the public sector serving as school teachers, police personnel, fire fighters, and those in government offices, the figures for union workers would be even lower. In 2017, only 6.5 percent of American workers in the private sector were unionized.

With the decline of strong unions, which served as a countervailing power checking big business and big government, the American middle class has had a hard time. Its buying power has remained flat for the last 20 years, even while enormous wealth was being accumulated by the very rich. Most middle-class families have been able to keep up with the rising cost of living only by having both husband and wife gainfully employed outside the home. In addition,

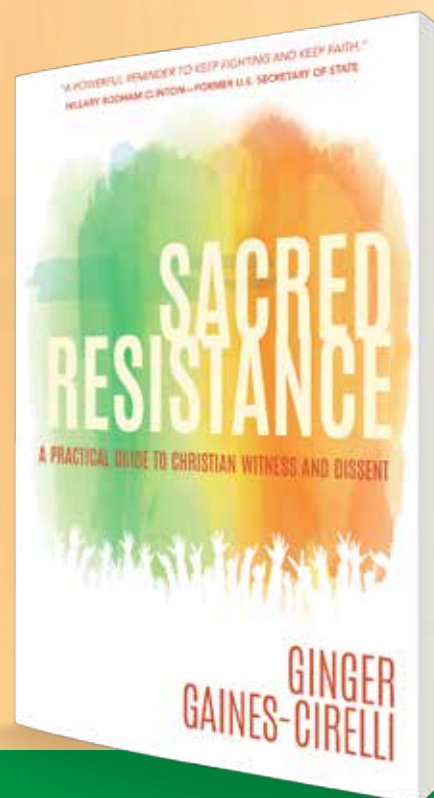
ENGAGE IN *SACRED RESISTANCE*

GET EMPOWERED TO SPEAK OUT
AND ACT IN TROUBLED TIMES

"Writing with the heart of a pastor and the passion of a prophet, Gaines-Cirelli breathes fresh, indeed sacred new life into 'resistance' and 'politics' reminding all Christians that standing with the marginalized, poor, and harmed is not a choice but a wondrous obligation. Hers is a powerful word for this moment in our nation, and for all moments."

—**Serene Jones**, President, Union Theological Seminary

Author **Ginger Gaines-Cirelli** pastors a church in the heart of Washington DC, adjacent to the White House, which actively works to bring justice and help for marginalized communities, and the endangered earth.



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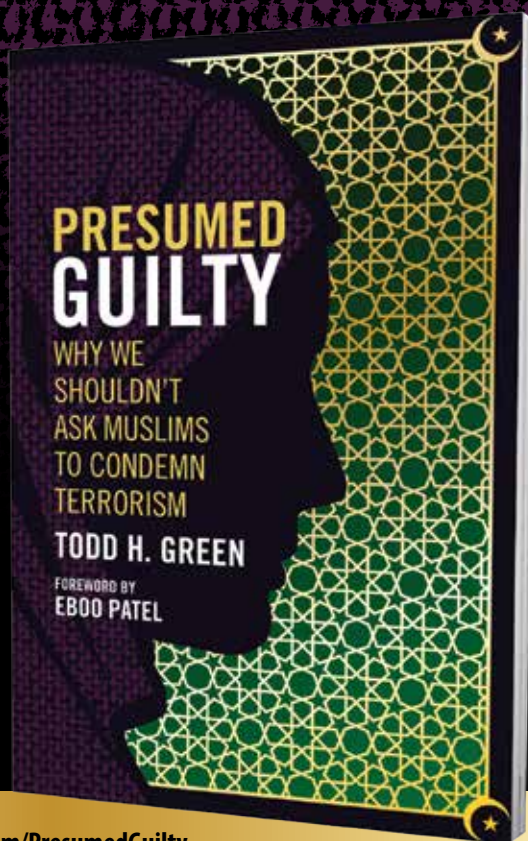


FRIENDSHIP, NOT FEAR, SHOULD DRIVE THE QUESTIONS WE ASK ABOUT MUSLIMS.

All of us should condemn terrorism, but the questions we ask Muslims are riddled with false assumptions. Renowned Islamophobia expert Todd Green opens the door to asking better questions, based not on the presumption of guilt but on the promise of friendship.

"In an age when facts are ignored and experts maligned, *Presumed Guilty* is a book we need now."

—Carla Power, author of *If the Oceans Were Ink: An Unlikely Friendship and a Journey to the Heart of the Quran*



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By Julie Polter

Unrequired Reading

There's always time for more books.

FEWER AMERICANS ARE reading for pleasure. According to the latest American Time Use Survey, the portion of Americans who read just for the joy of it on a given day has fallen by more than 30 percent since 2004.

I'm choosing to resist the tyranny of trends—by reading more. Lately that's meant sinking into a sprawling novel about trees, who, it turns out, are an active force, not just part of the scenery. *The Overstory*, by Richard Powers, is also about community, family, conscience, love, and fighting the powers.

My editorial colleagues are also making time to read. Their stacks include sci-fi (*Blackfish City*, by Sam J. Miller); historical fiction (*Homegoing*, by Yaa Gyasi and *Pachinko* by Min Jin Lee); a novel spanning Roman-occupied Jerusalem to the 21st century (*Eternal Life*, Dara Horn); short stories (*The Largesse of the Sea Maiden*, by Denis Johnson); poetry (*Don't Call Us Dead*, by Danez Smith); essays (*Feel Free*, by Zadie Smith); biography (*Galileo's Daughter: A Historical Memoir of Science, Faith, and Love*, by Dava Sobel); and many more.

Below are some nonfiction books that might fit in your leisure reading mix.

How did we get here?

When the daily political news is so overwhelming, we need books that take a longer view of the state of our contentious public square.

A significant majority of white evangelicals voted for Donald Trump, despite his



**44 Heresies of Whiteness**David F. Potter reviews
*Reconstructing the Gospel***45 Unfinished Struggle**Joyce Hollyday reviews
*Murder on Shades Mountain***45 Labors of Love**Kierra Jackson on
*Birthing Hope***Life stories**

When we get too busy with our own lives and worries, taking a walk in someone else's shoes can provide fresh insight.

Raised a progressive Muslim in Kashmir, Daisy Khan became a successful New York City architectural designer. In **Born With Wings: The Spiritual Journey of a Modern Muslim Woman** (Spiegel & Grau), Khan tells of how, after marrying an imam, she became a women's advocate, founding the Women's Islamic Initiative in Spirituality

Resist the tyranny of trends—read more.

and Equality and working globally against child marriage and genital mutilation and educating young Muslims to resist ISIS recruiters.

Rob Schenck became a radical antiabortion activist in the 1980s and a D.C.-based leader in the upper echelons of the Religious Right movement in the 1990s. In **Costly Grace: An Evangelical Minister's Rediscovery of Faith, Hope, and Love** (Harper Books), Schenck tells his story—and the unexpected turn it has taken the last several years as he became increasingly convicted by the problem of gun violence and repented for how his political activism strayed from his religious principles.

Robert Hudson is both a Bob Dylan scholar and member of the International Thomas Merton Society. He combines these passions in **The Monk's Record Player: Thomas Merton, Bob Dylan, and the Perilous Summer of 1966** (Eerdmans), a look at the influence Dylan and other poets and musicians had on the influential monk, theologian, mystic, writer, and social activist Merton.

Professor, writer, and cultural commentator Brittney Cooper often uses stories from her own life as a launching pad for broader political and social concerns. Co-founder of the Crunk Feminist Collective blog, Cooper provides rich, thought-provoking insights as a black, Southern, Christian feminist in her essay collection **Eloquent Rage: A Black Feminist Discovers Her Superpower** (St. Martin's Press).

Continued on Page 43

New & Noteworthy

Artist
SueAnn Shiah**Singing in Exile**

On *A Liturgy for the Perseverance of the Saints*, Taiwanese-American artist SueAnn Shiah reimagines hymns "for those who have been driven out of the church because of their race, gender, or sexuality." With warm vocals and spare arrangements, Shiah invokes hope for those currently "stranded in the wilderness." sueannshiah.bandcamp.com

Faith and Imagination

In *A Light So Lovely: The Spiritual Legacy of Madeleine L'Engle*, Sarah Arthur digs deep into the personal journey of the influential and sometimes controversial *A Wrinkle in Time* author, revealing what L'Engle can continue to teach us. Zondervan

Room for All?

In *Believer*, Dan Reynolds, lead singer of the Grammy Award-winning band Imagine Dragons, delves into his Mormon faith and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' treatment of LGBTQ members. The moving documentary includes interviews with church members and chronicles Reynolds' journey as he works for change. HBO

Overcoming White Fragility

In 2011, Robin DiAngelo coined the term "white fragility." In *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism*, she offers reflections and concrete strategies for white people to "break out of the cycle of defensiveness and engage more constructively." Beacon Press

track record of decidedly unevangelical behavior and attitudes. In **Believe Me: The Evangelical Road to Donald Trump** (Eerdmans), evangelical and historian John Fea digs under facile explanations to explore with nuance the role of what he calls "court evangelicals" in Trump's political world and how fear of change, nostalgia, and pursuit of power has driven the Religious Right far from any scriptural moorings. Fea offers no easy solutions but does call fellow white evangelicals to the vital work of rebuilding a Christian witness rooted in hope, humility, and history.

Martha C. Nussbaum looks more broadly at the role of fear and other emotions in our current affairs in **The Monarchy of Fear: A Philosopher Looks at Our Political Crisis** (Simon & Schuster). She explores how fear (no matter where we are on the political spectrum) feeds destructive anger, disgust, and envy. This engaging book, with reference points ranging from ancient philosophers to current pop culture, ultimately points toward ways to foster hope.

After the Battle

TWO OF THIS year's most compelling music releases so far give a deeply personal voice to the moral, emotional, and psychological struggles of the men and women who have waged our long-term "war on terror." *Healing Tide* by The War and Treaty is the first full-length recording from this husband-and-wife team; the husband, Michael Trotter Jr., became a musician during his time in Iraq and has since struggled with post-traumatic stress disorder. Meanwhile, Mary Gauthier's *Rifles and Rosary Beads* features 11 songs co-written with Iraq and Afghanistan vets through the SongwritingWith:Soldiers (SW:S) project.

Trotter, the songwriter and keyboardist in The War and Treaty, enlisted in the Army in 2003 simply to provide health insurance and a steady paycheck for his daughter and first wife. Within six months he was in Iraq, stationed in the remains of one of Saddam Hussein's palaces. One day, a captain who had taken



something of a career going. She had a small part singing "His Eye Is on the Sparrow" with Lauryn Hill in the Whoopi Goldberg movie *Sister Act 2*. Trotter and Blount quickly became partners in music and everything else.

Together on stage and on their new Buddy Miller-produced album, *The War and Treaty* exorcise the demons of war and home-front violence, pushing Trotter's songs to their absolute limit with the power of love and the soaring, wrenching harmonies of gospel. They're being marketed in the "Americana" category, which suits their guitar-heavy backing tracks and mostly secular lyrics, but *The War and Treaty* are dishing out a distinctly sanctified brand of roots rock.

WHILE THE LYRICAL subject matter is different from her usual autobiography, *Rifles and Rosary Beads* is definitely a Mary Gauthier album. There's no mistaking its rough-edged acoustic guitar and drums sound, or the folk singer-songwriter's plainspoken twangy delivery. And Gauthier is right to have noted that these are some of the best songs she's written. Still she's also careful to keep the spotlight on

the Iraq and Afghanistan vets who co-wrote them. Gauthier is one of a couple of dozen professional songwriters who participate in SW:S. The songwriters and vets meet, typically at a retreat center, pair off, and try to write songs that will allow the soldiers to constructively process their pain.

I have no idea how songs such as "Brothers" (the plea of a female soldier who wants to be one) or "Iraq" (the story of another female soldier sexually assaulted by male peers) have worked as therapy for their co-writers, but for the audience they plumb the ambivalent depths of the contemporary experience of women at war, a side of the story not often heard.

In a brief essay on the SW:S website, Gauthier writes, "At their best, songs are not products for a market place. They are spiritual medicine for a world gone wrong." A lot has gone wrong in America's 17-year-old war on terror, and we are going to need a whole lot of musical medicine in the years ahead. These two records are a start. ■

Danny Duncan Collum, author of the novel White Boy, teaches writing at Kentucky State University in Frankfort.



"At their best, songs are spiritual medicine for a world gone wrong."

Trotter under his wing and knew that he could sing took him into a rubble-strewn room that held a piano. Trotter had never played in his life, but in his downtime he taught himself and started writing songs.

Then that captain was killed in action. Trotter wrote a song and performed it at the captain's memorial. The song was "Dear Martha," which the band still performs, and it made such an impression on all the soldiers at the memorial that Trotter's colonel tasked him to write and perform a song for the memorial services of soldiers who died in action.

Trotter kept performing after leaving the Army, and that's how he met Tanya Blount, who already had

Continued from Page 41

Gifts for the spirit

True “self-care” is far more than spa days and “me time.” Souls need rest and reflection to flourish.

In **Four Gifts: Seeking Self-Care for Heart, Soul, Mind, and Strength** (Herald Press), pastor and writer April Yamasaki guides readers through a scripture- and theology-informed perspective on taking care of our own needs, setting priorities, slowing down, and finding rest. The goal is to help us center our full selves on God.

Best-selling author Parker J. Palmer looks back on eight decades of life and for-

No matter where we are on the political spectrum, fear feeds destructive anger, disgust, and envy.

ward to what’s yet to come in **On the Brink of Everything: Grace, Gravity, and Getting Old** (Berrett-Koehler). With prose, poetry, and three downloadable songs by singer-songwriter Carrie Newcomer, Palmer explores the power in nurturing a healthy inner and outer life, seeking relationships across generations and racial, ethnic, and religious divides, and becoming “fierce with reality” to engage life fully to the end.

Unsettling the Word: Biblical Experiments in Decolonization (Mennonite Church Canada), edited by Steve Heinrichs, with illustrations by Jonathan Dyck and afterword by Sylvia McAdam, is a beautifully designed volume created in response to the long history of settlers and colonizers using the Bible as a weapon to justify displacement and oppression of Indigenous people. More than 60 writers, both Indigenous and settler, wrestle with the scripture through poetry, story, and essay, reclaiming its power to inspire and spur a more just future. This resource can inform life-giving preaching, teaching, and service—but the relatively short pieces also work as grist for prayer and individual reflection.

Why read? Here’s why.

If you’re the type of person who loves to not just read books but to read books



A DIALOGUE WITHIN

THERE’S A bluish light on the beach in **The Piano**, Jane Campion’s 1993 film about a woman mute by trauma-induced choice, sold from Scotland into an unwanted marriage in New Zealand, who deepens the roots of her soul and expands her reach into the air and the people around her. The same light is in the misty forest where her confused patron and eventual lover lives; but in her husband’s home, it is dark.

I remembered *The Piano* as an unusual Victorian romance, but watching it recently, in a restored version that accentuates the exquisite strangeness of its images and ideas, opened a forgotten room in my mind. *The Piano* functions as a love story that could happen “here”—a character liberates herself from oppression, claims her space in the world, and learns to love herself. But it also deals with mythic reality. Love, hate, power, healing, purpose, Being itself. Things I had not noticed the first time.

It’s often this way when we watch films from the past—we remember who we were, which of course is only ever who we *thought* ourselves to be; we compare with who we think ourselves to be now. A dialogue ensues between the younger and older selves. A movie that we then experienced as a masterpiece now seems clichéd, or one we did

not “get” the first time around now manifests as the film we’ve been waiting for all our lives. We weren’t ready before. Sometimes what we need most is to be reminded that the wonder we used to experience might be even more true than the skepticism that now burdens us.

Friendly advice to those seeking a more contemplative way of being amid the rush and panic of the day: Revisit a beloved movie, and let it inspire a conversation between the several selves you contain. Let it root you more deeply, or expand you more widely, or inspire you to watch something else instead. Be gentle with yourself.

I saw *The Piano* first when I was 18, and what did I know then about women or marriage or New Zealand or pianos? I remember being captivated by the story, but now I am almost overwhelmed by it (not to mention awed by Holly Hunter’s central performance). In the current cultural moment, *The Piano*’s invitation is even clearer: Pay attention to the story of a woman not being defined by what a man demands of her, who initiates her own healing and helps save him too. ■

Gareth Higgins is an Irish writer and founder of moviesandmeaning.com and www.irelandretreats.com.

that are about reading books, here are two worth checking out: British writer Francis Spufford is known for five critically praised and widely varied nonfiction books (including the excellent *Unapologetic: Why, Despite Everything, Christianity Can Still Make Surprising Emotional Sense*) and one prize-winning novel. He has a collection of charmingly quirky essays on writing, books, corresponding with cranky atheists, Siberia, and more, called **True Stories and Other Essays** (Yale University Press).

And in September Brazos Press will

publish **On Reading Well: Finding the Good Life Through Great Books**, by Karen Swallow Prior. Prior, a respected Liberty University English professor and writer, takes a fresh look at the power of great literature to shape our character and morality, exploring virtues in works including Jane Austen's *Persuasion*, Edith Wharton's *Ethan Frome*, and George Saunders' "Tenth of December." ■

Julie Polter is a senior associate editor of Sojourners.

Reviewed by David F. Potter

HERESIES OF WHITENESS

Reconstructing the Gospel: Finding Freedom from Slaveholder Religion, by Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove. IVP Books.

FALSE GOSPEL is interwoven throughout both our national identity and theological imagination. In *Reconstructing the Gospel*, Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove excavates our common story alongside his own lineage. With thorough historical analysis, Wilson-Hartgrove confronts misguided narratives of "who we are" and illumines our current sociopolitical reality.



the Gospel tells of his own untethering from slaveholder religion.

In perhaps the most compelling chapter, titled "Living in Skin," Wilson-Hartgrove examines how this tradition affects white folks' dis-ease with embodied life. He asks, "What evil spirit has left us out of touch with our bodies?" Believing the myth of white supremacy requires

relinquishing full humanity. "You can't shut up compassion in a human heart one minute and then go back to normal the next," says Wilson-Hartgrove. In the process, white folk lose sight of their bodies and solely elevate the spirit. A disconnected body and spirit results in a "fail[ure] to connect faith and politics in meaningful, consistent ways."

Wilson-Hartgrove insists that the gospel is fundamentally about reconstructing fragmented lives. "A gospel that doesn't confront racism is no gospel at all," he writes. For those seeking freedom from the wages of whiteness, the good news begins with a posture of humility. Humility led Wilson-Hartgrove to divest from the illusions of slaveholder religion and turn toward the gospel of Jesus, embodied by the faith-rooted, black-led freedom movement.

Reconstructing the Gospel seemingly flounders in its appeal to a theology of original sin. That white people inherit the

lie of human hierarchy is a fundamental truth. However, for those sickened by white supremacy, there must be something deeper than a generational investment in the delusion of race, a starting point beyond sin and trauma. Otherwise, a crippled conscience leads to a cycle of shame, which ultimately moves away from transformation and toward despondency.

Healing must begin with what practitioners in the field of moral injury call "identity reformation." White people must re-learn how to be. Wilson-Hartgrove writes: "Our brokenness is an inextricable part of who we've imagined ourselves to be." The way of salvation is reconstructing identity not in sinfulness, but in goodness.

Wilson-Hartgrove integrates the black-led freedom movement with monastic wisdom. From the Benedictine tradition, the central practices of listening, staying put, and constantly reforming your life are suggested "for people in America who want to unlearn whiteness ... to embrace the Christianity of Christ." The practice of listening to marginalized voices enlarges hearts and creates the capacity to identify racial blindness, habits, and politics.

Amid discomfort, grief, and lament, Wilson-Hartgrove urges people to maintain a posture of stability and presence. White people must faithfully respond to the lament they've engaged and the people they've heard, while knowing that "each step [they] take is both insufficient and inadequate." Committing to reformation requires adapting new information and standing in solidarity with those brutalized by white supremacy.

Those desiring salvation from slaveholder religion will find no blind optimism, easy antidotes, or sweeping appeals to racial reconciliation. Wilson-Hartgrove writes: "The last thing any attempt to reconstruct the gospel in America needs is a white man to lead the charge." Instead, Wilson-Hartgrove submits himself to the leadership of people of color. In the process, he extends his own vulnerability and provides gentle guidance for white folks on the journey to freedom. Because of this and more, *Reconstructing the Gospel* is an important book. ■

David F. Potter is special projects manager at Sojourners.

Reviewed by Joyce Hollyday

AN UNFINISHED STRUGGLE

Murder on Shades Mountain: The Legal Lynching of Willie Peterson and the Struggle for Justice in Jim Crow Birmingham, by Melanie S. Morrison. Duke University Press.

THE DEDICATION this spring of a memorial in Montgomery, Ala., to the more than 4,400 African Americans who were lynched in this country between the Civil War and World War II has brought renewed national attention to a historical outrage. Melanie Morrison's *Murder on Shades Mountain: The Legal Lynching of Willie Peterson and the Struggle for Justice in Jim Crow Birmingham* reminds us that not all such acts of terrorism and brutality were carried out by white mobs under trees and the cover of darkness. Some were perpetrated in courtrooms in broad daylight.

This meticulously researched book skillfully weaves glimpses of Morrison's family history into a riveting account of a horrific injustice. On Aug. 4, 1931, three young white women were attacked on a secluded ridge outside Birmingham, Ala. The only survivor, 18-year-old Nell Williams, related that she, her sister, and their friend had been held captive for four hours and "shot by a Negro." During the largest search party in the county's history, armed white vigilantes roamed the streets, black businesses were set on fire, African-American men were dragged off trains and out of their beds, with dozens detained, and at least three were murdered.

Almost two months later, on an unusually hot late-September day, 38-year-old Willie Peterson was slowly making his way down Birmingham's Fourteenth Street to a café. A frail former miner disabled by tuberculosis, he was looking forward to drinking a tall glass of sweet iced tea and picking up some cornbread and collard greens for his sick wife. In the previous weeks, Nell Williams had rejected scores of suspects paraded before her, and pressure was mounting for her to identify the killer of her sister and friend.

Spying Peterson, she pointed at him and declared, "I am sure that is the Negro." Willie Peterson bore virtually no resemblance to the description Williams had given the police, eyewitnesses placed him elsewhere during the murders, and even some of the officials involved in the case had serious doubts. But a court found him guilty of murder and handed down a death sentence.

Morrison—and we—may never have known about this travesty except that her father, Truman Morrison, was in love with Nell's younger sister, Genevieve. Raised in white privilege and wealth, steeped in his entrepreneur father's zealous embrace of segregation, he could not hold together that life and his belief in Peterson's innocence. Shocking those around him, he ended his relationship with Genevieve—the first step on what became a lifelong journey to understand racism and work toward its eradication.

Years later, his daughter picked up the mantle, spending her life as a tireless educator and activist for racial, sexual, and disability justice. And now Melanie Morrison blesses and challenges us with a powerful reminder that all of us with inherited privilege face a similar choice. In the introduction to *Murder on Shades Mountain*, she writes: "My father believed racism is a white problem and that he, as a white man, would be held accountable by his Creator for what he did or failed to do to confront, name, and mend this deep wound in the soul of America."

The book ends, as it begins, with a call to each of us to do our own work. In the afterword, poignantly written in the form of a letter to her late father, Morrison states the brutal truth: "The demonization

and criminalization of black men remains a national disgrace." Eighty-seven years after Willie Peterson was targeted on a Birmingham street corner, there is still much work to be done. This book offers inspiration to keep at it. ■

Joyce Hollyday is an author and founding co-pastor of Circle of Mercy in the North Carolina mountains, where she works with undocumented women and the immigrant sanctuary movement.

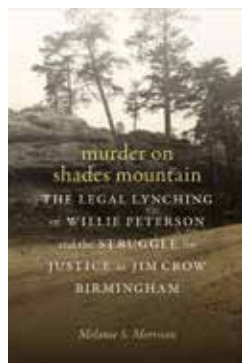
Reviewed by Kierra Jackson

LABORS OF LOVE

Birthing Hope: Giving Fear to the Light, by Rachel Marie Stone. IVP Books.

IN HER LATEST BOOK, *Birthing Hope: Giving Fear to the Light*, Rachel Marie Stone spiritually illuminates a painstaking, sometimes isolating, and often highly medicalized event in the life of a woman. In uncovering her own journey giving birth, Stone invites us to question our understandings of pain and passage, deliverance and rebirth, illness and privilege, and theology's long-complicated relationship to science. Stone uses her new memoir to inspire readers to comb through scripture and rediscover God as midwife.

Throughout the book, Stone includes passages from Isaiah, which "imagines God as birthing mother and midwife more than any other biblical book," Stone notes, "Christians across the spectrum of cultural, theological, and political points of view seem equally to neglect biblical images of God as a laboring woman." Chapter by chapter, Stone writes of labor and birth from a variety of vantage points that affirm the God closely linked to childbirth: Teenage Mary, struggling with morning sickness and at the end of her third trimester, pushing the Christ through her birth canal and into the world. A Malawian woman who must walk many miles home with her newborn strapped to her back mere hours after birthing. The Christian understanding of "being born again" as forgiveness, a fresh beginning, and as entering "into the womb of God to be born again." Each perspective expands the reader's understanding of rebirth through God.



"The demonization and criminalization of black men remains a national disgrace."

Stone is, above all, in a raw, faith-inspired, and benevolent relationship with the enduring metaphors of birth. She recounts her time working as an international teacher and doula in Malawi. For Stone, it was in Africa that the metaphor of birth began to expand as a time of suffering set to welcome new life. “Agony and ecstasy,” she writes. “It is the most bodily and most spiritual event I know. It is life touching hands briefly with death.” Her gift in crafting prose flourishes as she exposes the complex, holy, and gritty nature of childbirth.

Refreshingly, Stone’s charge for her readers begins in the table of contents. Twelve of her 15 chapter titles are verbs—active, encouraging, provoking us to “risk, reflect, dive,” all marking specific stories in her life as a daughter growing up in a Christian household with Jewish relatives, as a mother and wife, and as an American doula working domestically and abroad. Throughout the book, Stone skillfully sets scenes.

At times, Stone breaks from her charging rhetorical style, which left me asking, “Wait, where are we?” And her tendency to dwell on her chronic anxiety distracted me from the larger story. Her metaphorical classification of her experience in Malawi as a “miscarriage” may also be off-putting to some of her readers. Throughout the book, Stone’s relationship to the country wavers. After catching a baby at a birth while gloveless, which exposed her to HIV, Stone consults with her physician in the U.S. and thinks about “how much safer it would be just to stay away from Malawi.” But overall, Stone’s passion shines through and these elements don’t detract from the larger journey, which stays true to its course.

Stone’s story concludes with the chapter “Till We Become Real,” which serves as a hopeful promise and encourages a patience for authenticity. “What comes at the end of this life, full of struggles large and small? St. Paul says that the whole creation, including us, groans as if in childbirth, waiting to see what kind of redemption awaits us; what there may yet be.” Stone’s book makes clear that suffering, struggle, and deliverance are very much a part of the human story. ■

Kierra Jackson lives in New Haven, Conn., with her husband, Aaron, and is studying to become a nurse-midwife.

Short Takes

FIVE QUESTIONS FOR...

Rev. Bill Terry

Bio: Bill Terry is rector of St. Anna’s Episcopal Church in New Orleans. In 2007, he started to list the names of individuals recently murdered in the city on a board outside of the church’s building. The church sees the “murder board” as a public memorial, a way to humanize victims of urban violence.

Website: stannanola.org

1 What inspired the murder board?

When we talk about murder in the United States, we tend to talk in terms of numbers. Cities talk in terms of a murder rate, which is dehumanizing. We thought we would start listing the names of murder victims rather than numbers. We used to have the names printed, but the printers couldn’t keep up, so we started writing them down. We list the names, the age, and whether the individual was shot or stabbed. That has a visceral impact and, in and of itself, tells a story. There’s nothing glorious about it. It’s a holy site, and people have a holy response to it. Through the board, we began to humanize the deep loss in our city.

2 What impact does the board have?

It’s hard to be a Republican or a Democrat when looking at the murder board. It’s hard to be accusing and making aspersions against a race, community, or economic class. More than 2,000 names are on that board alone. They are [people murdered] from 2007 to 2012 in a city of less than 500,000. And during that period, our population got as low as 350,000. I had a police officer who came here and noticed the permanent memorial. He asked if it was all the murders in the state, and I said no, it’s [murders] in New Orleans. He was shocked. Then he went over and started reading the board from left to right. He spent about 20 minutes just slowly walking along the board. He walked back to me, very quiet, tears in his eyes. He said, “I counted three guys I went to high school with. I had no idea, Father.” Then he quietly walked away. That’s the transformative power of our public exhibition.

3 What is the future of the exhibition?

An artist came up with the idea of installing stars on the ceiling of our church. One star for every murder victim. We’ve already got 3,000 stars. They haven’t been



made yet, but that would be the number. [We would] geographically locate them throughout the ceiling and tie that into a small computer where people could locate the star representing their loved one. The installation would be profoundly moving and create a pilgrimage site for people to come and wonder about urban violence, not just here, but throughout the United States. It would be a graphic representation and a holy representation.

4 You’ve been writing names on the board for nearly 11 years now. What keeps you hopeful?

Well, at the end of the day, when political horizons shift and change, I think Americans are getting informed enough to, at some point, pass reasoned gun laws that might, if not eliminate, certainly reduce the possibility of gratuitous violence. That’s my hope. And I’ve got to keep hoping.

5 You said that you don’t want to be remembered as the murder board priest. How do you want to be remembered?

As a guy that reached out into a diverse community, who showed the love of Christ to all races, all genders, all creeds, and all sexual orientations—the real gospel of Jesus.

—Interview by Christina Colón

Illustration by Faith-Marie Zambile

In Suicide, Who Sinned?

SUICIDE IS A SIN. As a Catholic, that's what I was taught. Life is a gift from God; only God can take it away. Suicide chooses despair over God.

But I've never understood suicide to be an individual sin. It's a communal one—based in a profound failure of love.

This past spring, two young men committed suicide while in the custody of the Department of Homeland Security. Beyond individual and communal sin is structural sin—when lovelessness is made into policy and enacted with cruelty. Note all the places where love failed.

In May, Marco Antonio Muñoz, a 39-year-old Honduran refugee, died in a south Texas jail cell of apparent suicide a few days after being forcibly separated from his wife and 3-year-old son at the U.S. border. And I mean “forcibly.”

When Border Patrol agents told Muñoz that the family would be separated, he “lost it,” according to *The*

receive an adequate mental-health assessment during the intake process. The Border Patrol released Muñoz's wife and son from custody after his death.

Less than a month later, Zeresenay Ermias Testfatsion, a 34-year-old Eritrean refugee, died during deportation from the U.S. According to the *Post*, he apparently hanged himself in a detention facility at the Cairo (Egypt) International Airport, where ICE agents had transferred him to Egyptian authorities en route to Eritrea. Testfatsion was seeking asylum in the U.S. and had spent 16 months in detention before deportation. His family was waiting for him at the airport in Eritrea. “I don't know what's going on or why he's dying. Why? Why? What happened?” said Georgis Gebrendras, his cousin. “They needed somebody to [be] taking care of him,” she said.

“Tragically, many Eritrean refugees are torture survivors,” said John Stauffer, who works with Eritreans in the United States. “Eritreans who are denied asylum often fear a fate worse than death if forced to return to Eritrea. This man may have felt that.”

Who sinned? Catholic catechism teaches, “Everyone is responsible for [their] life before God who has given it to [them]. ... It is not ours to dispose of.” Yes, we must take individual responsibility, when we can.

However, Catholic teaching also says, “Grave psychological disturbances, anguish, or grave fear of hardship, suffering, or torture can diminish the responsibility of the one committing suicide.” Who takes communal responsibility for



A 4-year-old boy weeps with a family member as they are apprehended by Border Patrol agents near McAllen, Texas.

the conditions in which these men died?

Who sinned, Jesus asked? Who took the life—the one who hanged himself or the ones who ripped his child out of his arms or may have returned him to torturers? Or those of us who paid for it?

For Christians, love is a universal obligation. We practice it toward all, believers and nonbelievers. Love as a social ethic puts into common practice what is right, just, and noble. It upholds freedom, dignity, and life as inalienable rights. Love is as love does.

“Cultures of domination rely on the cultivation of fear as a way to ensure obedience,” wrote cultural critic bell hooks in *All About Love*. A government policy that forcibly separates children from parents to instill fear and obedience is not only untenable, but profoundly anti-life. Therein lies the sin. ■

Rose Marie Berger, a Sojourners senior associate editor, is a Catholic peace activist and poet.



Love is a universal obligation.

Washington Post. “The guy lost his s—,” an agent said. “They had to use physical force to take the child out of his hands.”

Muñoz was transferred to a county jail and placed in a padded isolation cell. Guards checked on him every 30 minutes. Reportedly, every time the guards passed during the night, they noted him praying in the corner of his cell. By morning, Marco Antonio Muñoz was dead.

The sheriff's department video footage showed that “inmate Muñoz had taken off his sweater and used his sleeves to tie them around the steel grate on the floor used for the drain, making a loop.” He apparently died of strangulation, as is common in prison deaths—especially with short-term detainees who may not

Finding God in Dark Alleys

SEPTEMBER'S READINGS ARE challenging and provocative. They call us out of our comfort zones, demanding that we examine our lives carefully in light of what it means to be a follower of Christ. In the story of the Syrophoenician woman, we glimpse Jesus speaking harshly to someone seeking his help. However, we also see what happens when that woman refuses to remain silent: Jesus answers her request. Her daughter is cured; life is restored. Who are the people who seek our help? As we read the news, whose lives and deaths reach out to us? And how do we answer them? If we dare to call ourselves Christians, then turning away from them is not an option.

The gospels show us that witnessing to God's love in our world demands entering into the margins, the places where human tradition masking as religion tells us that God is not to be found. As feminist theologian Marcella Althaus-Reid notes, we must venture down the "dark alleys" to find God in lives and bodies too often deemed "indecent." For those of us who like to patrol the boundaries of decency and indecency, we need to ask ourselves

if such borders stem from God or from human traditions such as sexism, racism, classism, homophobia, and ableism. For those of us whose bodies and lives are called "indecent," the challenge becomes to exorcise the demons of self-doubt and internalized oppression that we carry within ourselves. It is only then that we can answer Jesus' question: "But who do you say I am?"



Pearl Maria Barros is assistant professor in the religious studies department at Santa Clara University in California.

[SEPTEMBER 2]

Faith or Religiosity?

Song of Solomon 2:8-13; Psalm 45:1-2, 6-9; James 1:17-27; Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

OUR READINGS THIS week challenge us to discern what constitutes religion and what it means to be a person of faith. In Mark's gospel, Jesus questions some of the religious rules of his time and accuses religious leaders of "[abandoning] the commandment of God and [holding] to human tradition" (Mark 7:8). In the letter from James we hear "religion that is pure and undefiled before God" is "to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world" (James 1:27). So how do we know what is God's commandment and what is human tradition when religion always arises from a particular sociocultural context and therefore is mediated through human language and experience?

The hint these readings give us is that our love of God, expressed in our care and love of neighbor, is what leads us to true religion and makes us people of faith. Are there areas of our lives—individual and collective—where we hold to human tradition because we mistake it for God's will? A way

to discern the answer to this question is to ask another question: Who are the widows and orphans of our own time? Widows and orphans constituted some of the most vulnerable people of Jesus' time. Who are the vulnerable in our world? To find them, we need only look to the margins of our society. To follow God's will, we need only to love and care for them.

[SEPTEMBER 9]

She Persists

Isaiah 35:4-7a; Psalm 146; James 2:1-17; Mark 7:24-37

"THE LORD LIFTS up all who are bowed down" the psalm tells us (146:8). Yet in the gospel story of the Syrophoenician woman, Jesus does not immediately lift her up. Instead, he seems to put her down by saying, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs" (Mark 7:27). Such harsh words are

unexpected from this messiah who continuously surrounds himself with the outcasts of his time. He has essentially called her a dog. Nevertheless, she persists. She reminds him, "even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs" (verse 28). Fascinatingly, Jesus fulfills her request—casting out her daughter's demon—precisely because this woman has dared to talk back to him.

Historically, women have been conditioned to remain silent, to be subservient to men. An expected response from this woman would have been for her to accept Jesus' insult and turn away. But, she does not. She speaks up; she stands her ground. And Jesus takes notice. What a powerful lesson for women and all those who have suffered oppression because of their gender. God does not ask us to keep silent. Instead, God lifts up those who are bowed down when we have the courage to raise our voices in the struggle for justice. Psalm 146 reminds us: "Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob [and Rachel]," the God "who executes justice for the oppressed," the God who hears women who dare to speak.

[SEPTEMBER 16]

Giving Witness

Isaiah 50:4-9a; Psalm 116:1-9; James 3:1-12; Mark 8:27-38

"WHO DO YOU say that I am?" Jesus asks his disciples and us (Mark 8:29). To whom do our lives give witness? This spring, the world seemed captivated by the royal wedding of Meghan Markle and Prince Harry. News outlets kept revealing "must know" wedding secrets and details. Wedding coverage was intermixed with stories of pervasive sexual abuse of women and girls by privileged men, the rise of ozone-destroying emissions, and the Trump administration's continued practice of separating children from their immigrant parents, some of whom were then deported. The haunting photo from Gaza of Layla Ghandour's mother weeping over the body of her dead 8-month-old baby was on the front page of many newspapers. I remember Jesus' words: "But who do you say that I am?"

In a world in which we are constantly bombarded with information—some of it

beautiful and much of it terrifying—how do we witness to Christ? We can become numb to the horrors that tear apart our siblings and families around the world and in our own communities. It is tempting to focus on the shiny, pretty things (and sometimes that might be a temporary necessity for mental health). However, Jesus reminds us that we cannot remain with the shiny, pretty things. “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me” (Mark 8:34). In today’s world, part of our cross might be the constant cultivation of compassion.

[SEPTEMBER 23]

Examining Privilege

Jeremiah 11:18-20; Psalm 54;
James 3:13 - 4:3, 7-8a; Mark 9:30-37

ALTHOUGH IN MARK’S gospel Jesus is very clear with his disciples that he will die and rise again (this is the second time he has foretold his death), they “did not understand him” and “were afraid to ask him” for clarification (Mark 9:32). Can you blame them?

How will I use my privilege to serve those who do not share it?

The last time Peter made a comment, Jesus equated him with Satan and told him to get back (see 8:33)! Instead, they concern themselves with the all-too-human desire to be “the greatest.” Jesus quickly dashes their hopes for fame and power, saying, “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all” (Mark 9:35). What a bummer!

On a serious note, the idea of servant leadership that stems from this passage must be unpacked. Jesus says this to a group of folks who are arguing over power and who already have a certain amount of power, given that they are his disciples. The call to be “last of all and servant of all” applies firstly to those aspects of our lives where we hold some type of privilege. For some of us, we have the racial privilege of being white in a world that privileges whiteness; for others, we have the gendered privilege of being

male in a world that privileges maleness. Jesus invites us to ask: How will I use my privilege to serve those who do not share it? How will I become “last of all and servant of all” in those places where I hold privilege? Jesus is not calling us to be doormats. We are not called to keep silent in the face of oppression because we are “last of all and servant of all” due to our race, gender, ability, or sexuality. We are only last in those places where we are first.

[SEPTEMBER 30]

Cut It Off

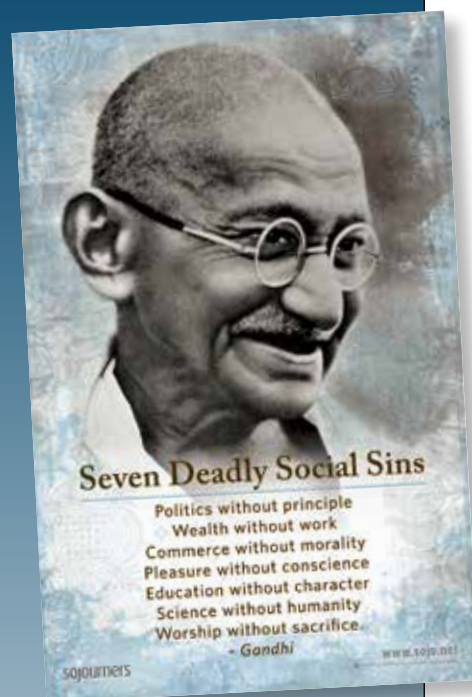
Numbers 11:4-6, 10-16, 24-29;
Psalm 19:7-14; James 5:13-20; Mark 9:38-50

WHATEVER “CAUSES you to sin, cut it off” seems to be the main theme of this week’s gospel. We might read this call to “cut off” what leads us to sin as a call to examine the sources of our sinfulness and to eradicate them as best we can. Sometimes we tend to think of sin too narrowly—a list of dos and don’ts. I remember preparing third graders for the sacrament of reconciliation. When the day arrived for them to make their first confessions, they were nervously wiggling in their seats. One boy called me over and proudly declared, “Teacher, I hit my sister in the car so I could have a sin to confess.” Yikes! Yet isn’t this how some of us interpret sin? Namely, as these glaring actions that are totally disconnected from our everyday lives.

Sin, however, is typically much more insidious. Sin tears at our relationship with God and others; it is a way of being in the world. Sin lies to us, telling us to believe that we are justified in our narrow-mindedness, in our inability to welcome the stranger, to ponder their story. The good news is that grace is also a way of being in the world. Grace comes to us every time we “cut off” our problematic behaviors by acknowledging them and then replace them with those that lead us closer to God and to each other. ■

“Living the Word” reflections for October can be found at sojo.net/magazine. “Preaching the Word,” Sojourners’ online resource for sermon preparation and Bible study, is available at sojo.net/ptw.

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Jail: Perfect for a Little Me-Time

FORMER TRUMP campaign manager Paul Manafort has a lot of time these days to relax, put his feet up, and fondly remember his sweet career as a jet-setting consultant to politicians whose character flaws were easily offset by their deep pockets. Those were the days, he muses from his bunk in a Virginia detention center, his snug cell reminding him of the similarly cozy—and opulent—cabins of the private jets he used to hire.

While I would never, in this data-driven world that strips people of their humanity, reduce a man to a mere number, his is 45343. (Which I'm *totally* playing in next week's Pick Five lotto! Why should Manafort have all the luck?)

Most people awaiting trial for wrongdoing involving millions of dollars in bribes, kickbacks, and influence peddling—you know, victimless crimes—can remain in the comfort of their own homes. And Manafort did this for a few months, padding around his house in slippers and a decorative ankle monitor (available in beige or artichoke). But being a social guy, he



working for the corrupt government of Ukraine before it was ousted, and then applied his unscruples to the highest bidders back home.

But to be fair—and I *really hate saying this*—he now deserves our sympathy and compassion.

Because he is on The List.

It's not a long list, but it's very specific, with little wiggle room for interpretation. The List comes from the Bible, in both Testaments, with clear line items: Care for the poor, feed the hungry, comfort the sick, welcome the stranger, and—wait for it—release to the captives.

Sitting in a jail cell, Manafort is now on that list and not eligible for the righteous scorn we Christians are anxious to dole out. “Lock him up!” may not be in our vernacular, but when “justice rolls down like waters”

we want to decide who gets wet. And we usually cast our fiery judgment where it hurts the most: on Instagram. (Or when the clear voice of God is demanded, we tweet.)

Unfortunately, loving your enemies doesn't come with loopholes (a little help, Mueller?!). From Isaiah to Jesus, “release to the captives” is one of the biggies. Although, in Manafort's case, is it too much to ask for due process first? How about a “slow release” to the captives, like one of those 24-hour gel caps for a cold? (Do they have one that takes 10 to 15 years, with time off for good behavior?)

Thank goodness for The List since I, too, am an incorrigible scofflaw, a hardened criminal deserving of my punishments. Although my crimes were not in pursuit of filthy lucre—if I knew what lucre was, I'd probably want it cleaned and folded—I *have* been convicted of crimes and languished in jail as a result.

My longest incarceration was for 10 days. I was also kept in lock-up overnight and later, unrepentant and clearly a recidivist, I was put in lock-up again, shivering in a 4-x-8-foot cell with a metal bed and matching commode. (Who knew you should bring your own toilet paper?!) Ken Davis

While Manafort acted with shadowy figures tied to the Kremlin, I was accompanied by non-Russian Christian activists when we, to cite one example, lay down in a street to interfere with a trade show of arms manufacturers. (Frankly, I was glad to be handcuffed and led away. The asphalt didn't have my sleep number and I was getting stiff.)

In that civil disobedience, and in many others, we acted against injustice to the vulnerable. In contrast, the rapacious Paul Manafort was, essentially, protesting the injustice of having to fly coach.

To be clear, when the Prophet Isaiah called for release to the captives, he's referring mainly to those wrongly imprisoned, as opposed to the Profit Manafort, who could be rightly imprisoned. But we can't split hairs or, in my case, foreheads. As much as we want to be God's henchpersons, vengeance ain't ours to give. (*SO not fair!*)

Manafort will probably get a presidential pardon anyway. But don't think for a minute it will be biblical. ■

Ed Spivey Jr. is art director of Sojourners.

As a hardened criminal, I'm here to help.

couldn't stop contacting a Russian associate to discuss ways to help potential witnesses remember that he did nothing wrong. This was considered witness tampering by a judge, although I call it “just getting your stories straight,” which is important when facing trial. (I'd also suggest posting your innocence on Facebook, because the number of “likes” is now part of the sentencing guidelines.)

Without a doubt, Manafort is a profoundly unsympathetic character whose collusion with authoritarian leaders was not confined to Donald Trump. He earned millions



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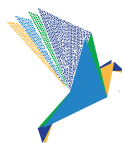
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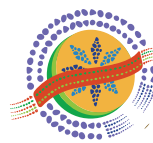
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